

# ASHTON-KIRK SPECIAL DETECTIVE



JOHN T. M<sup>c</sup>INTYRE

**Third Volume of the Ashton-  
Kirk Series**

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# **Ashton-Kirk Special Detective**

By

**John T. McIntyre**

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Bat Scanlon, two-handed fighter and trainer, is worried. He visits an old friend in his big country house, and runs into some queer things he cannot explain—the thunder that rumbles over the hills when skies are clear,—the harp that is played without sound, enemies without—and a traitor within the house.

Bat calls on Ashton-Kirk, who has solved some strange mysteries, and a special detective comes to grapple with the terror.

But why say more?—Read it—No more mysterious stories were ever written than the Ashton-Kirk Mystery Stories.

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Ashton-Kirk Secret Agent**

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**Ashton-Kirk Criminologist**

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“A GOOD BLADE”



# ASHTON-KIRK SPECIAL DETECTIVE

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By JOHN T. McINTYRE

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Author of  
*"Ashton-Kirk Investigator"*  
*"Ashton-Kirk Secret Agent"*  
*"Ashton-Kirk Criminologist", etc.*



FRONTISPIECE BY  
RALPH L. BOYER

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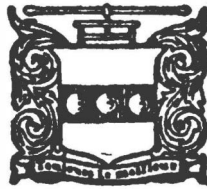
A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers

New York

Published by arrangement with The Penn Publishing Company

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**Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective**

*To my friend*  
**RALPH L. BOYER**



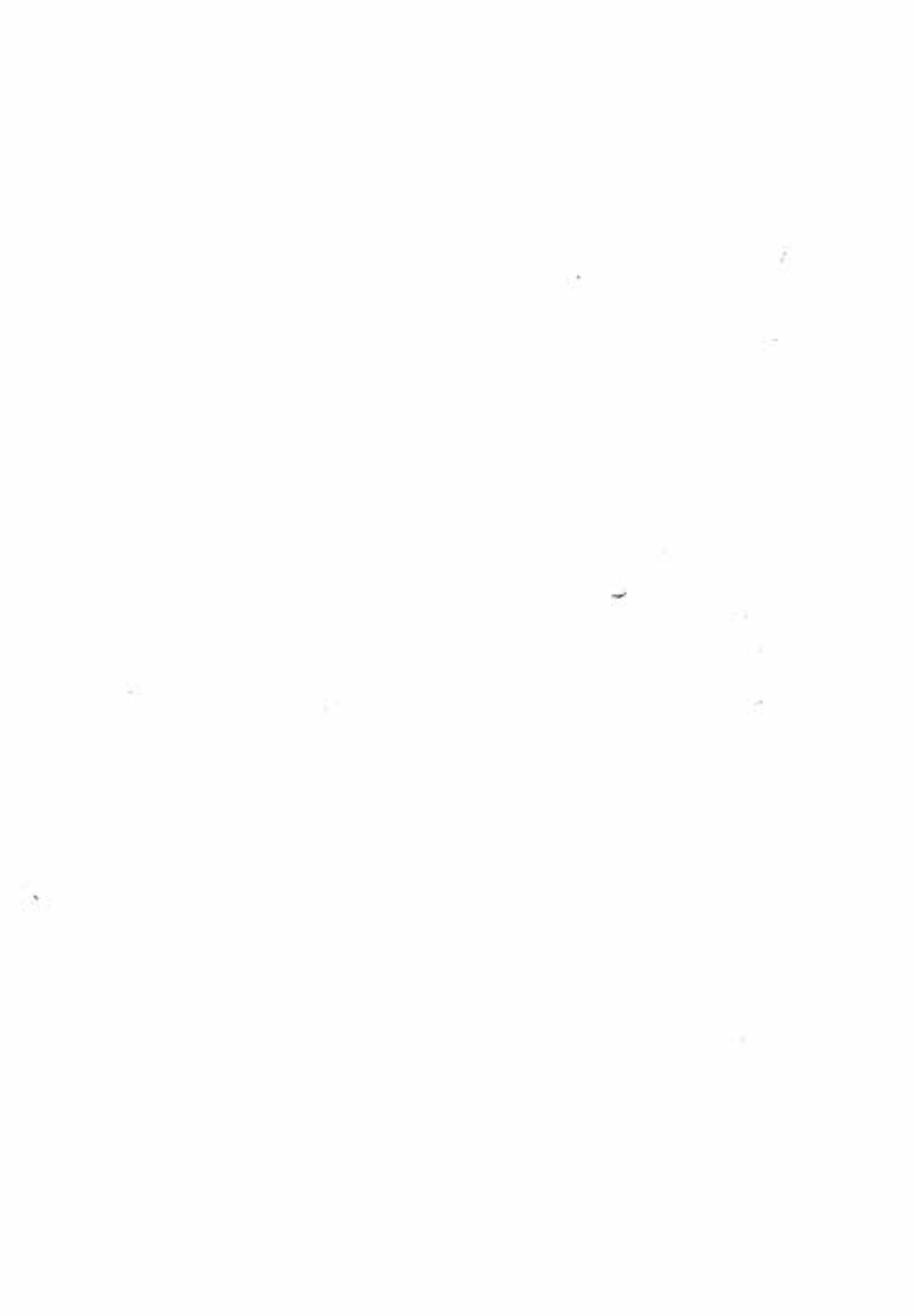
## Introduction

ASHTON-KIRK is a young man of means and position. The unusual has a sort of fascination for him; his subtle perception, and keen, direct habit of mind cause him to delight in the investigation of those crimes which have proved too shadowy for the police.

In "Ashton-Kirk, Investigator," another book dealing with his experiences, he was concerned with the strange case of the murder of the numismatist, Hume. In "Ashton-Kirk, Secret Agent," he was involved in a crisis between two nations; and a great war was averted by his skill and ready courage.

In this, the third volume of his adventures, he is called upon by an ancient friend who has been plunged into an appalling series of circumstances of which he can make nothing, except that all concerned are in immediate and deadly peril. And it is here shown how the special detective's acute mind, deft manipulation and resourcefulness warded off a terrible danger.





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# Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective

## CHAPTER I

### MR. SCANLON RELATES SOME PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES

ASHTON-KIRK, student of crime, sat cross-legged upon a rug; thoughtfully he drew at the big Coblentz pipe; the wreaths of smoke drifted over the tottering tower of books with which he was surrounded, and eddied out at an open window.

"Fuller," said he, "get me the name Campe."

The nimble fingered assistant ran through the cards of a filing system.

"Campe—Mexico—financiers?" said he, at length, turning his head.

"Right," spoke Ashton-Kirk.

"Volume II," said Fuller, closing the drawer.

"Shall I have it sent up?"

"Yes."

In a few moments, Stumph, gravest of men servants, entered, bearing a bulky folio which he placed before his employer.

"In a short time," said Ashton-Kirk, "Mr. Scanlon will call. Bring him up as soon as he arrives."

Stumph silently withdrew ; the special detective puffed at the Coblentz and nodded to Fuller.

"Let's see what we have about the Campes," requested he.

Fuller took the book, opened it at the index, and then turned over until he came to a certain page. He read :

"This family came, originally, from Bavaria, their forbears residing in the city of Munich. The name was then Von Campe. A Frederick Ernest Von Campe made a fortune as a brewer before the French Revolution. His three sons trebled this by lending it at a high rate of interest to the various needy German states during the Napoleonic wars.

"When Maximilian entered Mexico, the Von Campes helped to finance the venture. When he fell, they very cleverly managed to save their money by coming to an understanding with the succeeding republican government. For more than fifty years the family has been in Mexico, financing government and private enterprises.

"Some twenty-five years ago they dropped the 'Von,' becoming simply known as Campe."

Fuller then went on to read the doings of the Campes as contained in the record ; it was merely



a series of "high spots" such as might be gathered about a family of the same consequence anywhere. When he had finished, Ashton-Kirk looked dissatisfied.

"I find, from time to time," said he, "that this record is badly kept. It is loaded with the usual, when, as a matter of fact, it is intended solely for the unusual." He drew at his pipe for a moment, and then added: "I want intimate information regarding this family—especially of their doings during the last few years."

"Very well," said Fuller, briskly. "I'll start with the Mexican-Pacific Bank. They ought to know a deal about the Campes because they did a lot of business with them, according to what we have here."

As Fuller opened the door to leave the study, Stumph appeared with a big, fresh-faced man who clutched a hard-rimmed hat in his nervous grip.

"Mr. Scanlon," said Stumph; and then he followed Fuller out of the room.

"Glad to see you, Kirk," said Mr. Scanlon, in a voice which suited his proportions. "I hope I haven't come smearing in."

"Not a bit of it," the crime student assured him. "Here, have a chair; also have a cigar."

Mr. Scanlon sat in the chair, and pinched the tip off the cigar. He had blue, good-natured eyes,

the sort accustomed to laugh ; but now they were grave enough, and little troubled wrinkles showed at their corners.

"You look up to your ears in work," said he, his eyes upon the books.

Ashton-Kirk smiled.

"On the contrary, I've been resting," he answered, his gaze also upon the books, and filled with the mist which comes of deep plunges into the past, or into the annals of lands that never were. "When I'm overtaxed or too tightly strung there's nothing so relaxes me as the ancient romances ; there's nothing near so quieting as the sayings of the wise old monks, spoken in the cool of the cloisters."

Mr. Scanlon nodded appreciatively.

"Personally, I'm very strong for all those old fellows," said he. "They had speed, control and change of pace."

"Their greatest charm is their simplicity," said Ashton-Kirk, as he refilled his pipe. "They believed things as children believe them. Their days were rare with faith ; their nights with wonders. But," and there was regret in the speaker's voice, "the world has turned many times since then. There are no more wonders ; and surprise, as they knew it, has ceased to exist."

Mr. Bat Scanlon, one time athlete, gambler and gun fighter, but now a handler of champions,

brushed the first short plume of ash from his cigar. He shook his head.

"Wrong!" stated he, confidently. "Altogether wrong. You get behind the scenes too much; you see the insides of things too often. Wonder is as thick as ever it was; and surprise is still on the job. If there's any falling off, it's in ourselves. We've grown cross-eyed looking at fakes; we haven't the vision to know a wonder when we see it."

A volume of Burton lay upon the table at his hand. He picked it up.

"Here's Bagdad," said he, riffling the pages, sharply. "Bagdad, a city stuffed with strangeness. But," and he looked at Ashton-Kirk, earnestly, "had it really anything on this town of ours? Were its nights deeper? its silences more mysterious? I think not. Let any man—with his eyes open—mind you—go out into one of our nights, and he'll meet with as many astonishments as Haroun Al Raschid, the best prowler of them all."

Ashton-Kirk smiled through the thickening smoke. It were as though he had convinced himself of something.

"Your defense of present day interest is so keen," said he, "that I'm inclined to hope this case you have holds some exceptional features."

Scanlon nodded.

"And yet," with a gesture, "I'm not so sure. I can't put my fingers on a single thing, or even give it a name."

"It has something to do with this young fellow Campe, I think you said."

"It has all to do with him," stated Mr. Scanlon. "And that's one of the things that makes it so queer. He's the last one I'd expected to get mixed up with anything of the kind ; and he's a gone youngster if somebody with more stuff than I have don't step in and take a swing at it."

There was a short silence ; the smoke from the cigar mingled with that of the pipe ; eddying in the draught from the window they wove in and out intricately, finally mingled and drifted out into the big world.

"Suppose you go carefully over the affair as you know it," suggested Ashton-Kirk. "I got very little of it over the telephone."

Scanlon drew at the cigar and gazed at the opposite wall where there hung that Maxfield Parrish print of the wonder-stricken brown sailors, peering into the unknown from the bow of their ship.

"If this was my own matter," said he, "I could take every individual happening by the neck and shake the information right out of it. But as it stands, I've only got a good straight look at one thing that's at all plain to me."

"What's that ?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

"Fear," replied Scanlon, in a low-pitched voice, his mouth twisting wryly as he shaped the word. "Stark, white-faced fear; the kind that turns a man sick just at the sight of it."

The big man frowned for a moment at the brown sailors peering out over their mystic sea. Then he resumed.

"As I said a few moments ago, I was surprised at a young fellow like Campe indulging in a recreation like being afraid; for in him we have a wide-awake chap, graduate of one of the big colleges, holder of a middle distance record and known for his pluck. And for such a one to lock himself up in a big country house and go to shaking at every sound he hears is not quite pleasant."

"Fear, when properly planted, sinks deep and lasts long," said Ashton-Kirk. "I've seen strong men quite like rabbits, in the grip of something they didn't understand."

"I got acquainted with young Campe a couple of years ago when he sprung a tendon and they thought a big race was lost for his college. They sent for me as old Doc Emergency and I tinkered him up enough to go the distance. After that he got friendly. When he graduated, every one expected he'd go back to Mexico. But he didn't. He went into a German importing house here—a kind of partner, I think.



"I'd always measured him for a kind of a cut-up ; he never seemed to take things very seriously, and had a laugh that he kept constantly working. But about a year ago I noticed a change. He didn't talk so much ; if he laughed at all it didn't have the old time color ; and he got to sitting staring at the ground. When I'd talk, he'd listen for a while ; then he'd sort of drift away. I could tell by his expression that he wasn't getting a thing I was saying. Finally he took to walking the floor, biting his nails and whispering to himself."

Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"Pretty bad," said he.

"That's what I thought. And I mentioned the fact to him. But he tried to laugh—it was a complete failure—and said there was nothing wrong. He was a little nervous ; and even that, so he said, would wear off after a while.

"The day I spoke to him in this way was the last I saw of him until about two weeks ago. Then I got a letter, asking me to pack a bag and run up to Marlowe Furnace for a visit. 'The shooting's right,' says he, 'and I've got a brace of dogs that'll make you show excitement.'

"'This,' says I, to myself, 'is just about the right thing. Nothing'd suit me better now than to fuss with a dog and a gun.'

"So I wrote him I'd come at once. Marlowe

Furnace, if you don't know the place, is about twenty miles out, tucked away among the hills. It was quite a place in revolutionary times ; they beat out sword blades and bayonets there, and cast cannon, and the round shot to stuff them with.

"There's only a few houses, with an inn for summer visitors ; and there's a little covered bridge crosses the river, just like a picture on a plate. Campe was holding out at Schwartzberg, or Castle Schwartzberg, as the people of the town call it. The castle is a regular robber-baron kind of a place, with a wall around it, towers, battlements, little windows with heavy bars, and all the rest of the fixings."

"I know it," said Ashton-Kirk. "It was built by a German officer who came over with Baron Steuben during the Revolution. When peace came, he decided he liked the section well enough to stay. He was rich, and built Schwartzberg in the effort to get some of the color of the old land into the new."

"It was something like that," said Mr. Scanlon, nodding. "And the builder must have been related, in a way, to the Campes. Anyhow, they came into the castle some years ago. Well, to be invited to a place like that was not usual with me ; and I felt a little swelled up about it.

"'You've been asked because of your qualities.

as a sportsman and boon companion,' says I to myself; 'the discriminating always pick you for an ace.'

"But twenty-four hours later I had learned my true status," said Scanlon, his brows corrugating, and his thick forefinger tapping the table. "I had been asked to Schwartzberg to act as a body-guard, and for nothing else in the world."

"I see," said Ashton-Kirk.

"Mind you, the situation has never been put into plain words. In fact, it's never even been hinted at. But things happened, queer things, with no meanings attached, and so I gradually soaked the idea up. A body-guard I was; and my job was to protect young Campe from something out among the hills."

## CHAPTER II

### SHOWS HOW MATTERS STOOD AT SCHWARTZ- BERG

SCANLON paused for a space ; he examined a loose place in the wrapper of his cigar, while Ashton-Kirk sat waiting, upon his rug, his hands clasping his knees.

"When I first grabbed at this fact," said the big man at length, "I gave it a good looking over. But I kept still, mind you ; I said no more than the folks at the castle—and they were saying nothing at all. I tackled the thing from every angle, but nothing came out of it. And yet, all the time, young Campe shivered ; and, somehow, I felt that he had cause to do so. I could feel the thing, whatever it was, at every turn, in every shadow, in every sound."

"The condition of Campe probably had its effect upon you," said Ashton-Kirk. "He communicated his state of mind to you."

"In other words," said Mr. Scanlon, "I was stuck full of suggestion. Well, don't burden yourself with that notion any longer. I've had some brisk experiences of my own from time to time ; and a man with a tobasco past don't fall for

mental influences, not even a little bit. But, be that as it may, I hadn't been at Schwartzberg five days before I, too, began to feel like putting out a hurry call for help. And now, in a little more than twice that time, I come knocking at your door and urging you to do something."

"I get a general atmosphere of fear—of an impending something—of an invisible danger," said Ashton-Kirk. "But there's nothing in what you've told me which permits of a hand-grip, so to speak."

"I told you," began Scanlon, "there isn't a single thing which ——"

"I don't expect anything definite," said the special detective. "Give me the details of your stay at Schwartzberg. Perhaps we can draw something from those."

"Right," said Mr. Scanlon. "Well, as soon as I put my foot on the station platform at Marlowe Furnace, the thing began. The station man said to me :

" ' You going to Schwartzberg ? ' "

" ' Yes,' says I. "

" ' A party's been asking about you,' says he. "

" ' One of Campe's people, I guess.' "

" ' No,' says he. ' I know all them. The party was a stranger.' "

"I thought this a little queer, but I had my getting out to Campe's place to think of; and as it



was late and very dark, I said nothing more except to ask my way.

“‘Take the road down to the river,’ says the station man. ‘Then cross the bridge and turn to your right. You’ll see a lot of lights that look as if they were hanging away up in the air. That’s the castle.’

“So, bag in hand, I starts off. It was a starry night; but there was no moon and starlight isn’t much good on a road where the tree branches meet on either side. But I was headed right, and in a little while I made out the outlines of the covered bridge.

“‘Like a Noah’s Ark,’ says I, as I started across. Footsteps inside covered bridges on a still, dark night are apt to stir up a lot of other sounds; so when I began to hear a kind of shuffling alongside of me, I wasn’t surprised. ‘An echo,’ says I, and didn’t even turn.

“But when an electric hand torch shot a little tunnel of light through the darkness and hit me in the ear, I came about, quick enough.

“‘I ask your pardon,’ says a smooth kind of a voice.

“‘That I hand you, willingly,’ says I. ‘But, believe me, friend, you’ll have to go some to get anything else.’

“The worst of an electric torch in a dark place,” complained Mr. Scanlon, “is that the

party holding it has a good slant at you ; but all you can do to him is wink and look foolish. These being the conditions I didn't lash out at the party as I felt like doing, not knowing just how he was heeled ; so I waited for him to show what he had.

" 'You are on your way to Schwartzberg, I think,' says the voice.

" 'On my way is right,' says I, as confidently as I could. 'And, stranger, I figure on arriving there all safe and with everything standing.'

"The party with the torch appeared to be tickled at this ; for he began to chuckle.

" 'I'm very fortunate in meeting you,' says he.

" 'Fine,' says I. 'I always like to find people in luck. And now, if it's no trouble, suppose you come through with your reason for stopping me.'

" 'Of course,' says he. 'To be sure. I've a small favor to ask of you,' he says. 'If you'll be so kind, I'll have you carry this to young Mr. Campe.'

"And like that," here Scanlon snapped his fingers, "the light went out, and I felt the party put something into my hand.

" 'No explanation will be needed,' says the voice, if anything a little smoother than before. 'What I have given you will tell its own story.'

"Then I heard the pit-pit-pat of careful feet going back across the bridge. I waited for a little

to see if there was to be anything further ; but as there wasn't I put the thing the stranger had given me into my pocket, and took up the journey once more. At the end of the bridge I looked up the river ; there was a sort of mist lifting from the water, but high above this a battery of lights twinkled and blinked in the distance.

“ ‘If that's Schwartzberg,’ says I, ‘Campe's got her well lit up.’

“I struck along a road which led over the hills ; and in half an hour I was thumping at the gate of the castle.

“There was a little empty space after my knock,” said Scanlon. “Then I heard footsteps and the sound of whispering. Suddenly I was flooded by a light from somewhere over the gate ; I heard a man mention my name in a kind of a shout ; then the gate opened, I was dragged in, and it swung shut after me, the bolts and things falling into place with a great racket. Young Campe had me by the hand and was shaking away for dear life.

“ ‘I'm glad to see you, old chap !’ says he. ‘Glad as I can be. But I never expected you on a train as late as this !’ He left off shaking my hand and took to slapping my back ; it all seemed feverish to me ; but like a boob, I took it all for just plain delight in seeing me. ‘You see,’ says he, ‘it's a pretty quiet kind of a place out here ;

and when you came a-knocking, we couldn't imagine who it could be.'

"After which," continued Mr. Scanlon, "I was led across a courtyard and through a high narrow doorway like a slit in the wall. A few steps down a stone paved corridor and we turned into a room that was a ringer for Weisebrode's Rathskellar. And while I was looking around at the place, Campe went on talking as if he'd never stop. This wasn't usual, and as I now had a good view of him under the light, I noticed that he was pinched looking; there were hollows in his face and neck that I'd never seen there before.

" 'Well,' says he, 'here you are, old man, and there never was a person so welcome anywhere before. You see,' and his voice sank a little, 'there's been things about here that ——'

" 'Take care,' says some one. And as I looked around I saw a short, blocky German standing beside us, his hand at a salute. He was sort of gray around the temples and he had as grim a face as I ever saw.

"Young Campe gave a sort of gulp. 'Quite right, sergeant,' says he. Then, to me, he goes on: 'This is Sergeant-Major Kretz, once of the Kaiser's army, and an old friend of my father's.'

"The sergeant-major salutes once more, but his face was like granite.

" 'I will take your hat and coat,' says he; and

then a thing happened which, for suddenness, has got anything I ever saw whipped to a standstill; and I've seen some sudden doings in my day. I pulled off my overcoat and gave it to the sergeant-major. He took it kind of awkwardly; something dropped from one of the pockets and slid across the sanded floor.

" ' Don't be so confoundedly clumsy, Kretz, says Campe, and he stooped and picked the thing up. But when he got it in his hands and gave it one look, he threw it from him and gave a gurgling sort of cry. Then he swung around and leaped on me like a madman, both hands digging into my throat."

Ashton-Kirk shook the ash from the Coblentz and nodded at his visitor.

" Rather impulsive," said he.

The big man's hand caressed his throat; it was as though he still felt the clasp of the young fellow's fingers.

" It was no easy job tearing him loose," said he. " He stuck to me like a wildcat; his intention was to do for me on the spot."

" What was the thing that set him off? " asked the crime specialist.

" After I'd got him into a chair with the sergeant-major holding him," answered Scanlon, " I took a look at it. It was a smooth stone about the size of an egg, though not that shape, green

in color, and with a humped up place on one side of it. I had no recollection of ever having seen it before, and I was puzzled about how it got into my pocket. But while I was puzzling, it flashed on me.

“‘It’s the thing that fellow gave me while I was crossing the bridge,’ says I.

“‘Let me up,’ says young Campe to the German. There was something nearer sanity in his eyes than there had been a few moments before ; so the sergeant-major let go of him.

“‘What fellow?’ says Campe.

“‘I didn’t know him ; it was dark and I didn’t even see him. He spoke to me on the bridge coming from the station. He gave me this thing for you. He said you’d ask no questions, but he didn’t mention,’ I couldn’t help adding, ‘the other things you’d do.’

“Campe grabbed my arm with both hands.

“‘If you can,’ says he, ‘try and forget that I lost my head just now. If you knew what a be-deviled man I am, you’d only wonder why I don’t go permanently mad.’

“Then he stands looking at the green stone, which the sergeant-major had put upon the table ; his lips twitched, his face was white.

“‘Oh, they are cunning,’ says he. ‘They know the nature and substance of fear. They play upon it with the expertness of devils. But,’ and he

lifted one clenched fist, 'they'll never break my nerve ; I'll hold out against them, no matter what they do.' "

"That was pretty direct," spoke Ashton-Kirk "What followed ? Did he say anything more ?"

"The German sergeant-major took him away before he could indulge in any further remarks ; I didn't see him again until next morning ; and then nothing at all was said about the doings of the night. A couple of times I was on the point of asking him to put me up in the reason for his goings on ; but something in his manner and expression kept me back.

"In the late afternoon we all went out for a breather among the hills. But it was more like an expedition into the enemy's country than an exercise. They put a couple of Colt automatics in my pocket, and each of them took one. Also the sergeant-major carried a Mauser rifle with kick enough to have killed at a couple of miles.

" 'Sometimes there are vagrants who get impudent,' said Campe. 'I've known them to attempt robbery ; so we may as well be prepared.'

"Next day we took the dogs and guns and tried for some birds ; at night we locked the place up like a prison. The days that followed were about the same ; I never felt so thick a depression anywhere as there was in Schwartzberg. For hours no one would speak ; our meals would go

through like a funeral rite ; sometimes I'd catch myself chewing my food to the tune of a dead march. After dinner we'd have a gloomy game of cards ; at about ten we'd all go off to bed, one by one, and seem glad to do it."

"Your first visit wasn't pleasant," said Ashton-Kirk.

"I got no fun out of it except the tramping around, and then only when I'd go off by myself. I'd packed and jumped out as soon as I'd sized matters up, but there were two things kept me back. First, I like young Campe, and I wanted to help him out ; second, something was doing of a piquant nature, and I had a curiosity to know what it was.

"Several times, from my bedroom windows, I saw Kretz prowling about the courtyard or upon the wall. Once I fancied I caught the creeping of a couple of figures beyond the wall. I went out to look up the nature of the stunt, and almost got myself shot by what Campe afterward called prowling tramps. On the following night as I sat reading in my room, I heard a woman's scream—sudden and high with fear. There was a rush of feet along empty corridors, sharp voices and the slamming of doors. I grabbed up my automatic and, all in disarray, I broke for the scene of excitement. But half-way down a flight of stairs I came upon Sergeant-Major Kretz, quite calm, but look-



ing a little grimmer, if anything, than I'd ever seen him before.

"‘It's nothing,’ he tells me. ‘The Fräulein was frightened. All is right. You need not bother.’”

"There's a woman, then, at Schwartzberg?" said Ashton-Kirk.

"Two of them, to be exact," returned Scanlon. "One's an aunt of Campe's; the other is a companion, or something of the kind. The girl I see often, but the aunt very rarely. But I never did more than nod to either of them until the night Campe was cut."

"Cut!"

"In the body," said Scanlon. "That was two nights ago. I had gone to bed rather later than usual and had, I think, been asleep only a few minutes when I was awakened by a sound. I sat up and listened. Then it came again. Far off, as though among the hills, came a roaring; it started like a murmur at first, and grew in volume until it rumbled like nothing I'd ever heard before. Then it died away, and only its echo remained, drifting above the hillsides.

"‘Thunder,’ says I.

"But the sky was filled with stars, and they shone as brilliantly as stars ever shone before. Once more came the roaring in the night; with my head thrust far out at the window, I listened. A door opening on the courtyard slapped to, sud-

denly ; quick footsteps sounded and Campe's voice, high and angry, came to my ears. The gate opened before him ; I could see him, a revolver in his hand and with all the appearance of madness, rush away in the direction of the great sound.

" I commenced jumping into my clothes, a garment at a jump ; a brilliant tongue of light shot from the top of Schwartzberg, and began to sweep the country round about much like the search-light of a battle-ship.

" ' They are strong on equipment,' says I to myself, as I grabbed my gun, and made for the door. This time I met no one on the stairs, nor in the courtyard, when I reached it, nor yet at the gate. Once outside I looked up ; the light was streaming out over the hills from the tallest turret of the castle ; and in the gloom beside the reflector I saw Kretz, his Mauser in his hands, his face turned as though he were grimly picking up each detail as the light brought it out.

" I had noted the direction which Campe had taken ; so I struck after him. Two hundred yards away from the castle I heard his revolver begin to speak ; then there came the eager straining breaths of men engaged in a struggle, the grinding of feet, and a heavy fall. I had all but reached the spot when the great ray swept round and held fast. I saw young Campe stretched out upon the ground ; and over him stood the girl, all in white,

with her face upturned, her arms outstretched toward the high turret as though imploring the grim rifleman to hold his fire."

"Well?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

"She was a peach; and Campe was close to being all in. I backed him, and with my automatic held ready, and the girl trailing behind, I got back to the castle where I heard the gate closed and locked behind me with some thankfulness."

"Was Campe badly hurt?"

"He had a long, peculiar cut down his chest and stomach, not deep, but ugly looking. It was just as though some one had made a sweep at him with something big and heavy and keen, and he had pulled back in time to escape most of it. But he was about next day; he thanked me for going out after him, but sat tighter than ever on the explanation thing. It was after this that I tried to reason it out for the last time. But it's no use—the thing's beyond yours truly. So here I am."

The singular eyes of Ashton-Kirk were full of interest; he arose from his rug and took a couple of turns up and down the room; then he threw open a bulky railroad guide and his searching finger began to run in and out among the figures.

"There's a train for Marlowe Furnace at 8:04," said he.

Then he pressed one of a series of call bells in the wall, and, through a tube, said to some one below :

"Have dinner a half hour earlier. And set places for two."

"I didn't think you'd jump into the thing with any such speed as this," spoke Mr. Scanlon, highly gratified.

"It looks like a case which will admit of no delay," replied Ashton-Kirk. "Something of a deadly nature is lowering over Schwartzberg ; that's plain enough. And that young Campe is so secretive about it is an indication that it's one of those things which cannot well be spoken of to the police."

## CHAPTER III

### IN WHICH THE SPECIAL DETECTIVE TAKES UP THE HUNT

AFTER dinner, Ashton-Kirk smoked a cigar with his friend ; then he retired to dress for the journey to Marlowe Furnace. When he reappeared he wore a rough, well-fitting gray suit, a gray flannel shirt, a cloth cap and a pair of springy tan shoes. In his hand he held a heavy hickory stick, which he balanced like a swordsman.

"You look primed for work," approved Bat Scanlon, as he stood up and buttoned his coat across his big chest.

"Your story of the doings in and about Schwartzberg holds out a promise of entertainment," smiled Ashton-Kirk. "And I've noticed that things of that sort are always more appreciated if they are prepared for and met half-way."

"Good !" praised Mr. Scanlon, who was in high good humor at his success in gaining the interest of the specialist in the unusual. "Fine ! That's the kind of talk I like to hear. It puts a man somewhere. Locking himself up and shivering never got anybody anything yet. And then going

mad and rushing out to have unseen parties chop at him is even worse. When I taught boxing to the boys out at Shaweegan College I used to hand them this advice : ' Always keep after your man—don't let him get set. And the best block for a blow is another blow—started sooner.' ”

“ Excellent,” agreed Ashton-Kirk. “ And it's a thousand pities you didn't impress it upon young Campe. If you had, he'd never have been in his present state of mind and body.”

The huge shoulders of Scanlon shrugged in disbelief.

“ Campe was past all reason when I got to him,” maintained he. “ To talk candidly would only have queered any chance I had of doing him a good turn.”

The 8:04 was a dusty, ill-conditioned train which started and stopped with a series of jerks. After an hour on board of it, among a lot of uncomfortable, sour-looking passengers, the two got off at Marlowe Furnace. The station was a shed-like structure with a platform of hard-packed earth, and a brace of flaring oil lamps. An ancient, with a wisp of beard and thumbs tucked under a pair of suspenders, watched them get off.

“ The station agent,” said Scanlon.

The train went panting and glaring away into the darkness ; it had disappeared around a bend when the station official nodded to Scanlon.

"Evening," greeted he.

"Hello," said Scanlon.

"Back again, I see."

"Yes—once more."

"Nobody asked for you to-night."

"That so?" said Scanlon, his glance going to Ashton-Kirk.

The detective dug carelessly at the hard-packed earth of the platform with the tip of the hickory stick.

"The person who asked for my friend the last time he stopped off here was a stranger to you, I understand."

The ancient official took one of the thumbs from under a suspender and raked it thoughtfully through the wisp of beard.

"Don't remember ever seeing him before," stated he.

"I suppose you couldn't recall what he looked like?"

The ancient looked injured.

"I'm sixty-seven year old," said he, "but I got good eyesight, and a better memory than most. That man I talked to that night was a stranger at the Furnace. If I'd ever set an eye on him before I'd remembered him. He was fat and white and soft looking. And he talked soft and walked soft. When he went away, I'd kind of a feeling that I'd been talking to a batter pudding."

"Have you seen him since?" asked the crime student.

The old man shook his head.

"No. And I don't know how he got here, or went away—unless he drove or come in an automobile. He didn't use the trains."

The road down toward the river was steep, and lined with trees upon each side; their interwoven branches overhead, as Scanlon had explained, were dense enough to keep out most of the light.

"It's pretty much the same kind of a night as the one I used when I first came here," said Bat. "Stars, but no moon."

The wooden bridge, with a peaked roof over it, crossed the river at the foot of the road; the square openings upon either side showed the dark water flowing sullenly along.

"Look," and Bat Scanlon pointed out at one of the windows of the bridge. "There are the lights of Schwartzberg."

Some distance away—perhaps a mile—and high above the west bank of the river, hung a cluster of lights. So lonely were these, and so pale and cold that they might well have marked the retreat of some necromancer, in which he pored over his dark books of magic.

"It's a peculiar thing," said Ashton-Kirk, his eyes upon the far-off lights, "what various forms fear takes. Here is a man who, apparently, is in



constant terror of some one, or something, and yet we find him lodged stubbornly in a place where a secret blow might be leveled at him with the greatest ease."

"That struck me more than once," spoke Mr. Scanlon. "And I felt like putting it to him as a question shaped something like: 'Why stay here when there's places where there's more folks? Why stick around a spot where there's always some one cutting in with an unwelcome surprise, when you can get good house-room in places where there's a-plenty of burglar alarms, and lots of night sticks?'"

Their feet sounded drearily upon the loose planks of the bridge; and when they emerged at the far end they found themselves upon a narrow road which ran off into the darkness.

"On, over the hills, in and out, and up and down, until it lands you at Schwartzberg gate," said Scanlon.

They climbed to the top of a hill; the sky was thick with stars, and the light from them touched the high places with pale hands. But the hollows were black and deep looking; mystery followed the course of the slowly-running river.

"What is there about Campe's place?" asked the crime specialist. "Is this the only road that leads there? What are his neighbors like?"

"To the first of those questions," said Mr

Scanlon, "I reply, fields—also hills—also woods. There are roads passing Schwartzberg upon either side. As to neighbors, there's a few farmers, and their help. And then there's the man who flags the bad crossing down by the river, and the inn."

"Ah, yes, you mentioned the inn before," said Ashton-Kirk.

"A big, old-fashioned place—built away back in the old times."

"With a wide hearth and a hearty old landlord, whose father and grandfather owned the house before him."

"Well, I guess that's how it ought to be, to be in the picture; but it happens that this landlord has been here for only about six months."

Scanlon heard the hickory stick slashing at a clump of dried brush; then the crime specialist spoke:

"How far away is it?"

"A couple of miles."

"Maybe it'd be as well if we went there and bespoke a bed, if they'll take us in," said Ashton-Kirk.

Scanlon seemed surprised.

"I guess they've got room," said he. "But I had it in my mind you were going to Schwartzberg."

"I will pay it a visit, if I'm permitted, when I've

had a chance to see something of its surroundings. Your story, you see, shows plainly that, whatever the nature of Campe's danger, it comes from the outside."

Scanlon seemed struck by this ; then he nodded and said :

"I guess that's right. But don't you think a good chance to shake Campe down for some inside information would be better than anything else?"

"In its proper place, perhaps. But I want to look over the outside, uninfluenced. Five minutes' talk with a man in Campe's state of mind might color one's thoughts to such an extent that it would be difficult to see anything except with his eyes."

"That sounds like wise talk," agreed Bat. "And if there's anything in the world you don't want to get doing, it's seeing things as he sees them."

They followed the narrow road for some distance, and then the big man turned off into a path which led through a stretch of farm land.

"This is a short cut," said he. "I followed it frequently when I was out with the gun. It'll bring us to a road a bit beyond this timber ; and the road leads on to the inn."

A hundred yards further on they topped the crest of a hill ; before them loomed a dense

growth of trees which covered the slopes round about.

"It's a fine kind of a place in summer, I guess," said Scanlon, as they halted. "But of an autumn night when the air gets thin, the stars look far away, and there's a pretty well settled belief that some queer things are doing, it's got its weak side. When I was located in Canyon City, I swore in as a deputy one night and started out into the hills with the sheriff to look for two lads who'd fussed up a whole train load of Easterners, and got away with a bag full of dough. That country was some wilder than this, and was further away from anywhere; but," with a look at the gloomy wooded slopes, "believe me, it had nothing on it for that uncertain feeling."

As they stood gazing about, Ashton-Kirk's head suddenly went up. He bent forward in the attitude of listening.

"What is it?" asked the big man.

"Hark!"

Far away, among the hills to the north, came a deep muttering. Scanlon clutched the crime specialist's arm.

"That's it!" he cried. "Listen to it lift. It's the thing I heard roaring in the night."

Low, growling, ominous at first, the sound grew in volume. Then it pealed like a mighty voice, rolling and echoing from hill to hill, finally sub-

siding and dying in the muttering with which it began.

"According to the dope," spoke Scanlon, in an uneasy tone, "Campe is now due to take his gun in hand and dash for the gate. And, if he does, they'll do more than slash him. I've got a hunch they'll get him for the count, on the second try."

As he uttered the last word, a shaft of brilliant light shot from the tower of Schwartzberg, and flashed to and fro across the countryside.

Then came the quick, far-off pulsation of a rifle ; in the widening beam of white light they saw a woman crouching down as though in fear ; and then they caught the figure of a man, running as though for his life.

## CHAPTER IV

### TELLS SOMETHING OF THE MAN IN THE ROLLING CHAIR

"CAMPE!" cried Bat Scanlon, his eyes upon the fleeing man, and his hand going, with the instinctive movement of an old gun fighter, to his hip. "And giving his little performance outside once more."

But the keen eyes of the crime specialist had picked up details which the other had missed. He shook his head.

"No," said he. "Campe is a young man, you say. This one is past middle life. And also he seems sadly out of condition, and does not run at all like a man who once took middle distance honors."

The searching column of light still clung to the running man; again and again came the light shocks of the distant rifle.

"The woman has faded out of the lime-light," observed Scanlon.

"And the man is trying his best to duplicate the feat. Look—there he goes!"

With a wild side leap, the fugitive vanished into

a shallow ravine, out of range of both the ray and the rifle. At this the search-light was snapped off and darkness once more settled over the hills.

"Your German sergeant-major is no surprising shot," commented Ashton-Kirk. "He had his man in full view and missed him repeatedly."

Scanlon shook his head.

"It must have been the light," said he. "Kretz can shoot. I've seen him at it."

They stood in silence for a few moments; the country road about seemed heavier with shadows than it had been before the appearance of the shifting beam of light; the stars looked fainter.

"That's the second time I've seen that girl out here in the night," continued the big man. "And each time the noise came, and things started doing. I wonder what's the idea?"

"I fancy it's a trifle early to venture an opinion upon anything having to do with this most interesting affair," said his companion. "But," quietly, "we may stumble upon an explanation as we go further into it."

"I hope so," said Scanlon, fervently. Then, in the tone of a man who had placed himself unreservedly in the hands of another, "What next?"

"I think we'd better go on to the inn."

If the other thought the crime specialist's desire would have been to take up their course in the direction of the recently enacted drama, he did

not say. He led the way along the narrow path, and through the gloomy growth of wood. They emerged after a space into a well-kept road, and holding to this, approached a rambling, many gabled old house which twinkled with lighted windows and gave out an atmosphere of cheer. A huge porch ran all around it; an immense barn stood upon one side; and a half dozen giant sycamores towered above all.

"There it is," said Scanlon. "And it looks as though it had been there for some time, eh?"

"A fine, cheery old place," commented Ashton-Kirk, his eyes upon the erratic gables, the twinkling windows and the welcoming porch. "Many a red fire has burned upon its snug hearths of a winter night; and many a savory dish has come out of its kitchen. Traveling in the old days was not nearly so comfortable as now; but it had its recompenses."

Their feet crunched upon the gravel walk, and then sounded hollowly in the empty spaces of the porch. Scanlon pushed open a heavy door which admitted them to a great room with a low ceiling, beamed massively, and colored as with smoke. The floor was sanded; a fire of pine logs roared up a wide throated chimney; brass lamps, fixed in sockets in the walls, threw a warm yellowish glow upon polished pewter tankards and painted china plates. The tables and chairs were of oak, scrubbed



white by much attentive labor ; prim half curtains were at the small paned windows.

A short man with a comfortable paunch, a white apron and a red face came forward to greet them.

"Good-evening, Mr. Scanlon," said he, cordially. "I'm pleased to see you, sir. I'd been told you'd given us up and gone off to the city."

"Just for a breather, that's all," Scanlon informed him, as he and the crime specialist sat at a table near to the blazing hearth. It was still autumn, but there had been a dampness and a chill in the night air which made the snugness of the inn very comfortable.

The red-faced landlord smiled genially.

"I might have known that, even if the shooting is none too good, the bracing air would bring you back."

Ashton-Kirk glanced about the public room. A small, cramped-looking man sat at a table with a draught board before him, studying a complex move of the pieces through a pair of thick lensed glasses. A polished crutch stood at one side of his chair, and a heavy walking stick at the other. Deeply absorbed in the problem and its working out was another man, younger, but drawn looking, who coughed and applied a handkerchief to his lips with great frequency.

The hearty looking landlord caught the glances of the crime specialist, and smiled.

"My customers are a fragile lot," said he in a low voice. "The inns get only that kind in the winter," as though in explanation, "and some of them are worse than these. It's the air that does it."

"Makes them ill?" smiled Ashton-Kirk.

"Bless you, no!" The landlord placed a broad hand to his mouth to restrain the great responsive laugh which seemed struggling in his chest. "The air does 'em good, so the doctors say. Well, anyway," his humorous eyes twinkling, "it does *me* good by getting me over the slim season. If it wasn't for them, I'd have to close up after September's done."

Scanlon ordered some cigars and coffee, and as the host moved away to procure these, he said:

"The doctors are a great lot, eh? Once they piled all the high colored drugs into you that you'd hold; and now they talk fresh air until you'd almost believe you could live on that alone. There's one old codger who's got a pet patient here—some sort of a rare and costly complaint, I believe—and he insists on fresh air at all stages of the game. The patient, it seems, likes an occasional change; but the doc is as deaf as a post to everything except the sighing of the wind."

The coffee was served, together with some cigars.

"Both black and strong," said Ashton-Kirk as he tested one after the other.

"The coffee, sir, as Mr. Scanlon knows, is made after my own recipe," stated the landlord. "I'd not recommend it to one of my invalid guests, sir, nor to a well one as a regular tippie. But it has the quality and the touch, if you know what I mean."

"White is to move and win," stated the cramped-looking man. He rubbed one side of his nose with a hand that shook, and there was complaint in the gaze with which he fixed the pieces. "But I can't see how it's going to do it."

"White is to move, and win in four other moves," said the drawn-looking man, coughing into the handkerchief.

"Which makes it all the more difficult," said the other. His palsied hand fumbled purposelessly with the pieces; and the look of complaint deepened. The man with the handkerchief coughed once more, and looked mildly triumphant.

"They seem to be constantly engaged in these mad diversions," said Scanlon, his eyes upon the two. "At times, when I've been here, I've seen the excitement rise to that degree that I've considered calling out the fire department."

Just then there came a strident voice from another apartment.

"Who the devil is it?" it demanded. "If matters of importance are to be interfered with in this way, it's time that something was done ——"

Here the man with the cough reached out and clapped to a door, shutting out the voice. The landlord looked discomfited.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Shaw," said he. "I know it's annoying to you; but Mr. Alva must be worse to-day, and so is very impatient."

The drawn-looking man coughed hollowly.

"I'm very sorry for the gentleman's condition," spoke he, huskily. "But he should remember that there are others here who are equally ill in their own way; and that his outbursts are not at all agreeable."

The strident voice was lifted once more, this time muffled by the door; then another voice was heard remonstrating and apparently advising. Then there followed a soft rolling sound, the door opened once more and an invalid's chair made its appearance, propelled by a squat, dark servant, whose flat nose and coarse straight hair gave him the look of an Indian.

Beside the chair hopped a peppery little man with white hair and eye-glasses from which hung a wide black string.

"It makes no difference who he is," declared the peppery little man, fixing the glasses more firmly upon his nose and speaking to the occu-

pant of the chair. "The facts remain as I have said. But, Mr. Alva, there seems to be very little use in advising you. In spite of all I can say you'll keep indoors. Suppose it is dark? The darkness can't hurt you. Suppose it is damp? You can protect yourself against that. Air is what you want—fresh air—billions of gallons of it."

The man in the chair was wasted and pale; his almost fleshless hands lay upon the chair arms—his limbs seemed shrunken to the bone.

Bat Scanlon looked at Ashton-Kirk and nodded.

"Whatever it is that's got *him* has got him for good," spoke he, in a low tone. "I never saw any man's body so close to death without being dead."

The eyes of Ashton-Kirk were fixed upon the sick man with singular interest.

"And yet," said he, in the same low pitched way, "his head is very much alive. It probably would not be too much to say that it is the most vital thing in the room."

Scanlon looked at the invalid with fresh interest. He saw a dark face, not at all that of a sick man, and a pair of burning, searching black eyes. There seemed to be something unusual about the upper part of the head, but the man was so muffled up, apparently about to be taken out, that the nature of this was not quite clear.

"Drugs," stated the peppery little man, "are useless; time has no effect. To reach a case of your kind, air must be supplied—clean air—air containing all the elements of life. If I am to make a well man of you where others have failed, you must do as I say."

"He's the fresh air crank I was telling you about a while ago," Scanlon informed the crime specialist, softly.

"If I must go out," spoke the invalid in a surprisingly strong voice, "wrap me up well. I feel the cold easily."

The little doctor began arranging the blankets about the shrunken limbs; and while he was doing so, Ashton-Kirk arose.

"Let me assist you," said he, with that calm assurance which is seldom denied.

Deftly he tucked in the coverlets upon the opposite side, and buttoned up the heavy coat. But when he reached for the muffling folds about the sick man's head, all the sureness seemed to leave his fingers; Scanlon was astonished to see him bungle the matter most disgracefully; instead of accomplishing what he set out to do, he succeeded in knocking the covering off altogether.

"Pardon me," he said, smoothly enough.

The invalid returned some commonplace answer; and the doctor set about repairing the result of the volunteer's awkwardness.

"Your intentions are the best in the world," smiled he, "but I can see that you have spent very little of your time about sick beds."

Then he opened the door, and signaled the Indian. The chair rolled out upon the porch, and a moment later could be heard crunching along the gravel walk.

Ashton-Kirk smoked his black cigar with much silent deliberation, and sipped at the strong coffee. Several times during the next half hour Scanlon attempted to bring him out of this state by remarks as to the inn and its population. But he received replies of the most discouraging nature, and so gave it up. When the cigar was done, the crime specialist arose and stretched his arms wide in a yawn.

"I think I'm for bed," said he.

Scanlon looked his astonishment, but said nothing. His imagination had pictured some hours of looking about among the darkened hills—just how, and what for he had little idea ; and this announcement suddenly bringing the night to a close was not in the least what he had expected.

"All right," was his reply. "That'll do for me, too."

Rooms were assigned them, and each was provided with a candle in a copper candlestick ; and so they went off up the wide staircase. From the adjoining room, Bat Scanlon heard the sound of

pacing feet for some time ; after a little they stopped, but for all that he had no assurance that the special detective had gone to bed. So he stepped out and knocked at his door.

Entering, he found Ashton-Kirk, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, standing staring at the grotesque flare of the candle.

"Hello," said the big man, "I thought you were regularly sleepy."

"I am—a little. But a notion occurred to me down-stairs, and I've been trying to follow it out."

Once more he resumed his pacing, his hands behind him, his eyes upon the floor.

"Imagination is, perhaps, man's greatest gift," said he. "Without it there would be little accomplished in the world. But there are times when one is forced to put the brakes upon it, or it would lead one astray."

Scanlon looked at him curiously.

"What's set you off on that?" asked he.

Ashton-Kirk stopped in his pacing, and lifted his head.

"That object you had given you on the bridge upon the occasion of your first visit, and which afterward had such a startling effect upon young Campe—what did you say it was like?"

"It was a stone—not very big—dark green in color—and with a kind of a hump upon one side of it."



The crime student nodded ; there was a look in the singular eyes which Bat Scanlon had seen there only upon rare occasions.

"I remembered it as being something like that," said Ashton-Kirk. He took up the interrupted pacing for a moment ; then paused once more. "What do you make of that sound we heard out on the hills to-night ?"

Scanlon shook his head.

"You've got me," said he. "That's one of the things I put up to you when I called you in as a consultant."

Ashton-Kirk stood looking at him, nodding his head.

"Ah, yes, to be sure. Well, we'll see what can be done. And now," with a look at his watch, "if you don't mind being turned out, I think I'll go to bed."

"You mean to have a try at the Schwartzberg folks in the morning ?"

"Yes."

Scanlon turned and had his hand upon the door-knob when the crime specialist spoke again.

"Rather a peculiarly shaped head that man in the chair has."

"I noticed it," replied Scanlon. "It seems to slant back from just above the nose. Gives him an unusual look."

"Unusual—yes. I don't think I ever saw that

exact conformation except in ——” here he stopped short. “Well,” with another nod, “good-night. See you in the morning.”

## CHAPTER V

### SPEAKS OF ASHTON-KIRK'S FIRST VISIT TO SCHWARTZBERG

ON the following morning, Ashton-Kirk and Scanlon breakfasted at the inn ; then they each smoked another of the black cigars. At about nine o'clock they paid their bill and left.

"This road," said Bat Scanlon, as they trudged along, "is rather direct ; it leads on to an old mill built years ago, and now abandoned, and then down to the river."

"All things considered," spoke Ashton-Kirk, twirling his hickory stick, his keen eyes searching the ground, "we'd better get away from the roads and paths this morning, and head for Campe's place, across country."

Without any comment, Scanlon followed his lead. Down one slope and up another they went, skirting ravines and gulleys, but always keeping the towers of Schwartzberg in sight. The crime specialist seemed in excellent humor ; he whistled little airs, and cut at the stubble and withered stalks with his stick. But always were the keen, observant eyes traveling here and there ; once or

twice he left his companion and darted away ; but he always returned in a very short time, smiling and shaking his head.

"An interesting place," said he. "There are many indications of enterprise and thought. I shall have to go over it carefully ; it promises to repay even a great deal of labor."

"Look there," said Scanlon.

Ashton-Kirk's eyes followed the pointing finger. Upon the wall of Schwartzberg even at that distance could be seen a human figure.

"It's Campe," said Scanlon. "He's just noticed us."

As he spoke, the man on the wall drew out a field-glass and trained it upon them. Long and earnestly he looked ; then without making a sign, he lowered the glass, turned and disappeared.

"Gone to tell Kretz that I've hove in sight and am bringing a stranger," said Scanlon.

As they approached the building its details became more distinct. The gray stone, the narrow windows, the massive wall, the towers, indeed, all about the edifice, called up memories of those old feudal keeps in the Rhine country.

"It wouldn't surprise me in the least to see the gates swing wide, and the Baron and his men, with bows and bills, ride forth to bid us stand," said Ashton-Kirk.

"Well, there goes the gate," said Scanlon, shad-

ing his eyes from the sun. "And here come Campe and the sergeant-major. I don't see any bows nor bills; but it wouldn't surprise me if both packed a perfectly competent 'gat' somewhere about his person, ready to bring into action should you demonstrate anything but friendship and good will."

"I shall be careful to put nothing else on display," smiled Ashton-Kirk. "And now," with seriousness, "one word before they get too near. I am simply a friend of yours. You saw me in the city, and as I professed an interest in Schwartzberg, you brought me out to put in an hour showing me over the place if the owner does not consider it too great a liberty."

"I get you," said Mr. Scanlon, briefly.

Here the two advancing men came up. Young Campe was a well-built fellow and of good height. But his face was pale; there was a wild look in his eyes, and his manner indicated extreme nervousness. Scanlon's description of the German sergeant-major was quite accurate; he was square built and grim faced; there was a thick grayish patch in the hair above each ear; and he carried himself with the stiff precision of a man trained in a European barrack.

"How are you?" cried Scanlon, shaking Campe by the hand. "Would have got here last night, but I had a friend with me, and we stopped at the

inn. Mr. Ashton-Kirk," nodding toward that gentleman, by way of introduction.

Campe shook hands with the specialist in crimes, and Kretz saluted after his military fashion.

"Mr. Ashton-Kirk listened to me tell about Schwartzberg until he felt that he couldn't live another day without taking it in," Scanlon informed them. "So he's come over this morning, hoping it wouldn't be asking too much."

Campe's haunted eyes searched Ashton-Kirk ; it was on his lips to refuse the request, when the other stopped him by saying :

"I hope you'll pardon me ; but the fact is, I am something of a student of the period in which your house was built, and its absolute following, line for line, of the ancient plan, is of great interest. The Count Hohenlo, builder of the place, was related to you, I understand."

"An ancestor of my mother's."

"Indeed. That's very charming. The Count's career in this country was a most romantic one. The part he played in the history of the republic in its infancy has been obscured by the fanfare made in behalf of men not nearly so notable. His duel with the Frenchman, De La Place, was an exquisite piece of knight errantry ; and his defense of the ford below here, while the British occupied the city, was an act of daring which the historians do not make the most of."

A faint flush came into the cheeks of young Campe.

"It's an unusual thing to come upon one who knows anything of the Count's life or doings," said he. "I agree with you that the historians do not make the most of the exploit of the ford, nor do they give him any of the credit that is his due in other matters. It is my intention to write his biography some day; and I hope in that way to give him, in some small part at least, the place among the great outlanders which is rightfully his."

"Splendid!" applauded the crime specialist, while Bat Scanlon stood by and looked and listened in amazement. "That's a fine idea. The romance of two periods, and of three countries is in your hands. Such things are done too seldom in this day; in our hurry and bustle we have no time for the heroes of the past."

Young Campe looked at Sergeant-Major Kretz. But the grim face of the German was turned away; it was as though he knew what was to be asked in the look, and so saved himself the mortification of giving advice which he felt would not be taken.

"I am living a more or less retired life just now, Mr. Ashton-Kirk," said Campe, "and make it a rule to receive no one. But," and here his gaze went to Scanlon, "since you are a friend of Mr.

Scanlon's, and are on the ground, it would hardly do," and here he smiled, though faintly, "to turn you away."

"Kirk," said Scanlon, "has been my friend for years. He's quite a fellow in his way and has been of service to many folks, who were ready to put up their hands and quit. Now, here's your little matter," eagerly: "he could take hold of that, and ——"

But the voice of Ashton-Kirk broke in on him swiftly, but with a smoothness that covered its haste.

"Our friend Scanlon," said he, smilingly, "is something of an enthusiast. He has too much confidence in my little array of historical incident. But," and his singular eyes looked steadily into those of Campe, "if I can be of any assistance to you in the memoirs which you mean to prepare, you may command me. I shall be only too glad."

"That's what I thought," stated Scanlon, blowing his nose and growing very red. "I know you've got this historical stuff piled in till it's over your ears; so what's more natural than that you should give Campe a lift?"

"It may be that at some future time, when I am in the frame of mind for quiet study, I shall avail myself of your knowledge, sir," said Campe, as they walked toward the castle. "But at the present time," and once more the smile, though



even fainter than before, showed itself, "I am much taken up with more active matters, and have not the leisure."

Kretz took a huge key from his pocket and unlocked the gate; then he stood aside and the others passed in. The gate was at once relocked.

"This," said Ashton-Kirk, as he looked about, "would resist a considerable force, even at this day."

The high gray wall towered above their heads; it was of great thickness and its strength was evident.

Young Campe looked up at it and shook his head.

"It's strong enough," said he. "But for all that, Mr. Ashton-Kirk, it cannot keep out thoughts; and thoughts, if they are strongly marked and along a definite line, are more to be feared than armies."

They crossed the flagged court of which Scanlon had spoken and entered by the high, narrow door. A gloomy passage brought them to a room, the same, evidently, in which Bat had been received, for it was furnished with heavy oaken tables and chairs of ancient design, had a vaulted ceiling and was ornamented with the heads of huge stags and boars, and with trophies of arms, all of a day far past.

A girl stood at one side feeding a thrush through the bars of a basket cage ; she was attired in a gown flowing and white, her hair was the color of yellow silk, parted in the center, and hanging down over her breast in two thick braids.

"Miss Knowles," said Campe, and the girl turned. "A friend of Mr. Scanlon," continued the young man, "Mr. Ashton-Kirk."

The girl was very beautiful ; her skin was like velvet, and her color like roses. She was smiling as the crime specialist bowed to her ; but upon the instant that his name was mentioned, the receptacle which held the grain she had been offering the bird fell to the stone floor and smashed ; the delicate color left her cheeks ; she stood staring, her blue eyes full of consternation.

"Grace !" cried Campe, in alarm.

But in a single instant she had recovered herself ; the color rushed back to her face, the smile returned to the lips.

"It is nothing at all," she said. "That headache of which I complained yesterday seems not to have all gone. I've felt a little faint several times this morning."

"You should not be about," said Campe, anxiously. "And perhaps it would be best if a doctor saw you."

The girl smiled sweetly. Her teeth were magnificent ; and her lips were scarlet.

"Some stunner, eh?" whispered Bat Scanlon to Ashton-Kirk.

"To be about is the best thing I can do," said Miss Knowles. Then with a mischievous look, "Mr. Kirk will think I'm quite an invalid."

She was really a splendid creature, large and beautifully formed; her complexion, her eyes, the great crown of yellow hair and the flowing white gown gave her the appearance, backed as she was by the gray trophy-hung wall, of having stepped out of a medieval picture—the stately lady of some great baron, or the daughter of a belted earl.

"Invalids seem rather plenty hereabouts," said Ashton-Kirk with a quiet smile. "But none of them at all resembled you, Miss Knowles."

It seemed, to the eyes of Bat Scanlon, that a change came into the beautiful face—a subtle something, swift as the thought that occasioned it, and gone as quickly.

"You've been to the inn," she said with a gesture of dismay. "Poor things; isn't it dreadful? Some of them are really heart-breaking, they seem so helpless."

"You've visited the inn yourself, then?" and there was a mild note of inquiry in the pleasant voice.

"Oh, no; but I ride sometimes among the hills of a morning. It's a glorious place for that; and I meet them stalking slowly along, or being

wheeled in their chairs. Perhaps it is the contrast between the vigor of the season and their wretched state, but at any rate I feel very bad about it all."

"Mr. Kirk is a student of American history, and is interested in Schwartzberg and the builder," Campe informed the girl. "I am about to show him over the place. Will you go along?"

"Indeed, yes." Then to Ashton-Kirk, "I never get tired of the splendid old building; most of my time is spent in wandering about from room to room, imagining the history it does not possess," with a smile which once more showed her beautiful teeth. "Oh, if it were only as rich in romance as it seems to be! If the good Count Hohenlo had only performed some of his deeds here."

"Who knows," smiled Ashton-Kirk, "but that it has been left to a later time to give the old place the needed touch."

"But," said Miss Knowles, lightly, as they followed Campe out of the room and along a passage, "there are no strange knights to beat upon the portals with the handles of their swords; there are no arquebuseers to swarm over the wall."

"No; that's gone for good; but," and Bat Scanlon thought he detected an undercurrent of something in the crime specialist's voice, "as Mr. Campe suggested a while ago, high walls cannot keep out thoughts. Peril in these later days is not as candid as in feudal times—it has a seeping

quality—we can neither hear nor see it, at times, but it is there, nevertheless.”

The girl looked at the speaker ; and there was a smile in her blue eyes.

“And you think a place like Schwartzberg might get its romance in such a very modern manner! I’ll not believe it. Nothing but the clash of arms will satisfy me!”

Young Campe laughed, but there was very little of mirth in the sound.

“Why,” said he, “it may come to that in the end.”

But Miss Knowles made a pretty gesture of protest.

“Please don’t make game of me, Frederic,” she said. “You mean the vagrants who have been giving you so much trouble. They make very poor substitutes for men in armor, and I refuse to consider them.”

Room after room was visited and admired ; each was in keeping, both in furnishing and decoration, with the period of the building’s architecture.

“It is really tremendous,” said Ashton-Kirk, “and must require a horde of servants to keep it in order.”

“We have only two besides Kretz—and they are his wife and daughter.”

“I should like to see the kitchen,” said the

crime specialist. "Very different, I suppose, from our present compact institutions."

The kitchen was as huge as imagined; its bricked floor was scrubbed clean; its copper utensils gleamed upon the walls; the great fireplace held a turnspit upon which hung a goose, attended by a stolid-looking girl.

"The sergeant-major's daughter?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

"Yes, and here is her mother."

A heavy, vacant-looking woman entered the kitchen with some vegetables; she gave but a passing glance at the visitors, and tucking up her sleeves, proceeded indifferently about her duties.

As they reached the roof of Schwartzberg, Ashton-Kirk saw the search-light, which he had witnessed in operation the night before, mounted on one of the towers. It was a powerful affair, and seemed in perfect order. But as to its uses Campe said nothing; he passed it by as though it did not exist.

Away in every direction stretched the faded countryside; the hills swelled, the tops of the denuded trees waved starkly in the breeze.

"The prospect is sober at this time of the year," said Ashton-Kirk, as he gazed out over the hills. "But the summer at Schwartzberg, I should say, is very beautiful."

Young Campe nodded.

"Yes," said he, "it is. I have not spent much time here before now ; but the pleasant months would be well enough—if there were nothing else."

"Ah !" said Ashton-Kirk, "there are drawbacks, then. Nothing serious, I hope."

He looked at the young man with a smile.

"The plumbing, perhaps," said he. "It seldom is what it should be in houses like this."

But Campe shook his head, and made no reply. His eyes, still with the old haunted look lurking in them, went out over the country, and one hand stroked his chin.

There was very little conversation while they remained upon the roof. Descending, they were passing along a broad corridor when the sound of a harp, waveringly played, was heard and a voice singing a *lied*.

Ashton-Kirk, trailing observantly along in the rear, saw the girl start at this and pause. A strange look came into her face ; her hand went to her lips as though to prevent the words she was already speaking.

"Surely," she said, sweetly, "Mr. Kirk should not go without a view of the tapestries."

Young Campe looked perplexed.

"You see," said he to Ashton-Kirk, "there are some rare hangings—some six or seven centuries

old, I understand. And they are quite well worth seeing. But my aunt is there," and he gestured toward a door, "and I'm not at all sure that she ——"

He hesitated ; and the girl spoke quickly.

"She'll be pleased to see a visitor."

Then without waiting for a reply, she knocked upon the door and went in. In a moment she held the door wide and smiled out at the three men.

"You may come in," she said.

Upon entering the apartment Ashton-Kirk noted that it was much more elaborately furnished than the other portions of the castle. Various periods had been called upon for luxurious fittings ; costly rugs were upon the floor ; magnificent paintings covered the walls ; small carvings, very miracles of workmanship, were many ; and the tapestries, which hung against and covered the far wall, were gorgeous examples of that ancient mystery.

"My aunt, Miss Hohenlo," said Campe, "Mr. Ashton-Kirk."

"I hope you'll pardon the intrusion," said the crime specialist.

Miss Hohenlo smiled graciously. She was a small woman, and thin, with faded brown hair and dull gray eyes. She was elaborately dressed and rather showily ; about her neck hung a string of splendid jewels. Her hands were remarkably



small and white and well kept ; she fingered the strings of a gilt harp, and showed them delicately and to advantage.

"Indeed," said she, "it is no intrusion. Any friends of Frederic are my friends ; I try to impress that upon him. The tapestries are, of course, wonderful, and that lovers of beauty should desire to see them is, of course, to be expected."

She had a mincing, artificial manner of speech, much after the way of a lady in a mid-Victorian novel ; not once did she forget her hands ; carefully she touched the strings of the harp ; with many little turns and flourishes she showed their whiteness, their smallness, their delicacy.

She spoke of the tapestry and not of her hands, but it was plain to be seen which of the two she thought the more worthy of attention ; so Ashton-Kirk conversed with her and admired the caresses she bestowed upon the strings.

"The harp," said Miss Hohenlo, "is a beautiful instrument ; in fact, I will say it is the most graceful of instruments. The Romans and the Greeks, also, preferred it to the lyre and other forms of string arrangement."

"It is perhaps the most ancient of instruments," said Ashton-Kirk. "We trace it back to the Egyptians, and have no assurance that it was not known even before the time of that astonishing people. That the tight-drawn string of some war-

rior's bow first suggested the musical possibility of the form is more than likely true. Can you not imagine the earliest minstrel chanting his song of victory to the twanging of the bowstring which helped to bring that victory about?"

Never once since they entered the room had the golden-haired Miss Knowles taken her eyes from the face of the woman with the harp; and she wore a curiously expectant expression which Ashton-Kirk did not fail to note.

"Miss Hohenlo is devoted to her instrument," she said. "And such attachment is always charming."

Miss Hohenlo simpered, colorlessly.

"To me it is but a toy," she said.

Miss Knowles laughed. It was a light laugh, and had a musical sound; but there was something behind it which caused the crime specialist's eyes to narrow and grow eager.

"A toy," said Miss Knowles. "Oh, surely you don't mean that—after the nights you've shut yourself up with it in your hands."

The dull eyes of Miss Hohenlo, so it seemed, grew duller than ever; she looked into the beautiful face before her, and lifted one slim hand to her faded hair.

"My dear Grace," she said, "you are such an observant creature." The eyes turned upon Ashton-Kirk, and she went on: "And I had hoped

that my poor studies were unnoticed. One can never be sure of anything."

Here young Campe, who had been impatiently intent upon the tapestries, now turned to Ashton-Kirk.

"These are, perhaps, as early examples of Flemish weaving as one would be likely to find. They came into the possession of my family about the time of the French Revolution, a period when much that was rare and costly was kicking about, helter-skelter."

Ashton-Kirk examined the hangings with admiration.

"From the design," said he, "I'd venture that they came from the looms of either Bruges or Arras. The hand of Van Eyck—or a follower of Van Eyck, is unmistakable; and the greater part of their designs went to the weavers of those two cities."

Between two windows was a narrow strip of the tapestry and in examining this the attention of Ashton-Kirk was drawn to a huge, two-handed sword which hung against it.

"A rather competent looking weapon," said he; "and one which, no doubt, has seen excellent service."

Miss Knowles came nearer.

"And who can be sure that its days of service are over?" said she, with a smile.

A few moments before the crime specialist had caught something behind her laugh ; now he fancied a still more subtle something was hidden behind the smile.

"This blade was carried in the army of Barbarossa, at the siege of Milan," said young Campe.

"And by one of Miss Hohenlo's remote ancestors," added Miss Knowles, and again came the enigmatic smile. "You should hear her tell the story. It's really delightful. Sometimes I think she cares more for the sword than she does for the harp."

Miss Hohenlo advanced gingerly ; there was something so mincing in her manner, so entirely like the old maid of tradition, that Mr. Scanlon winked very rapidly and watched her with something like fascination. She stroked the bare blade with one small hand.

"It's ugly," she said. "It is rough and uncouth, much like a great mastiff reared outdoors and having no place in the house. But it has done much for the Hohenlos ; it has gained them fortunes in the past ; so why should I not cherish it ?"

"Why not, indeed ?" said Miss Knowles.

Scanlon noted that this apartment seemed of great interest to Ashton-Kirk ; the tapestries were exclaimed over and talked about ; the paintings were reviewed ; the carvings were gone over

minutely; the curious qualities and periods of various pieces of furniture were discussed.

"But the harp," mused the watchful Bat. "The harp seems to be the extra added attraction. It's got something that puzzles him, and he keeps going back to it again and again."

But it was not only the harp. The great naked sword hanging between the windows, backed by the bit of ancient tapestry, also seemed of continued interest. With a casual air, Ashton-Kirk more than once examined it; and his eyes, as Scanlon alone saw, were darting interest for all his seeming nonchalance. Once he took the weapon down and tested its weight in a sweeping stroke.

"It would take a person of some strength to use this with any effect," said he, and his eyes were upon Miss Knowles.

"I hope," said she, "that you are not one of those who believe that all the power has gone out of the race—that those of old times could do more than those of to-day." She took the great weapon in her hands and raised it aloft with ease. "See, even a woman could use it," she said.

And then with a smile she lowered the weapon and Campe replaced it upon the wall.

"I don't think," said the young man, "there's anything else of interest."

But Miss Knowles held up a protesting finger.

"The vaults!" she said. "No one could say he had seen a castle without visiting those parts of it that are underground."

But Campe did not at all take to the suggestion.

"They are damp and gloomy," he said. "We seldom go into them." He turned to Ashton-Kirk. "However, if you care to see them, I'll be only too glad."

"If it is no trouble," said the crime specialist, his singular eyes upon the beautiful face of Miss Knowles, "I'd be pleased to explore them."

With Kretz carrying a lamp, the three men descended into the regions beneath Schwartzberg. The damp from the near-by river had stained the walls and the stones of the pavement, the heavy arches hung with growths of fungus. The place was vast and gloomy; the radius of the lamp was small and beyond it the shadows thickened away into absolute blackness. The whole progress through the place seemed a bore to Scanlon.

"Cellars," commented he, "are fine places to keep coal in. Men who believe in encouraging industry have also been known to store wine in their cellars, so that the spiders could have something to spin their nets around. But for the purposes of exercise or for mild morning strolls they have their drawbacks. As for myself, I should prefer —

Suddenly there was a smash of glass, the lamp fell into fragments and the place was plunged into darkness. Scanlon, who was next to Ashton-Kirk, felt him spring forward like a tiger ; then came a sharp pistol shot, followed by another and still another.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN WHICH ASHTON-KIRK INDICATES MUCH BUT SAYS LITTLE

"A LIGHT!" cried Campe. "Strike a light, Kretz."

"No light," said Bat Scanlon, softly. "It is no time for such things when an unknown gentleman is abroad with a gat! And keep still."

The sergeant-major grunted something in German, apparently in approval of this advice. At any rate, Campe subsided. There was a space of silence. Then a footstep sounded; and Bat arose.

"That you, Kirk?" asked he.

"Yes," came the quiet voice of the crime specialist. "I think it's all right now. Is there any way of getting a light?"

A match crackled, then Kretz produced a candle stump from a niche in the wall. This he ignited. Ashton-Kirk came into the dim circle of radiance.

"I'll not ask whether you saw anybody," said Scanlon. "But," anxiously, "did you feel anything of him?"

"It's rather wild firing in the dark," returned the crime specialist. "And, perhaps," here there



was a dryness in his tone, "that's what kept us from being more or less shot up."

"Let's go over the place," suggested Scanlon. "Whoever it was must be still here. Get some more light, sergeant."

In a few minutes Kretz had a brace of stable lanterns; and with these throwing their rays about, and revolvers held ready, the four men made their way slowly through the cellars. There was no rubbish, nor lumber; everything was open to the lamp-light. And no one was to be found.

"Hello!" said Scanlon, amazed at this. "Here's a state of affairs. A while ago I wondered how they got in; now I wonder how they got out."

Ashton-Kirk had gone over the place keenly; nothing, even the smallest, seemed to escape him. Two small openings, heavily barred, allowed the daylight to drift in, and with his eyes on these, he asked:

"Are these the only means of ventilation?"

"Yes," answered Kretz.

The crime specialist tested the bars; as he wiped his fingers upon a handkerchief, he asked:

"How many ways are there of entering the vaults—from inside?"

"One," replied Kretz. "The way we came down."

"This sort of thing happened once before," said

young Campe. His manner was quiet, but his voice was cold with dread. "The only difference was that it was in the night, and ——"

The grim-faced Kretz, looking more granite faced than ever in the flickering light of the lanterns, growled something in a low tone; and the young man stopped instantly.

"It's the tramps," he added hastily. "We are greatly troubled by them. Scanlon," with a glance at the big man, "has seen something of their work."

Taking one of the lights, Ashton-Kirk went over the place once more. This time he gave much attention to the floor, and showed considerable curiosity as to the walls.

"You see," said he, laughingly, but not once relaxing his attention, "it is possible that the Count in his building of this place might have contrived the secret passage which legend tells us went with such buildings."

"No," said Kretz. "There is a plan of the house. All is marked there. Nothing is secret."

Much to Scanlon's surprise, the crime specialist seemed to take this as final.

"It is a thing which should be brought to the attention of the police," suggested Ashton-Kirk. "Prowlers who have secret means of entering cellars can't be comfortable neighbors."

"It might come to that in the end," said Campe

as they climbed the stone steps. He had a smile upon his lips, a wan hopeless sort of thing, and in the lantern light his eyes looked sunken. "But the police are sometimes very troublesome themselves."

They reached the upper hall, and Ashton-Kirk looked at his watch and a time-table.

"I have thirty minutes to reach the station," said he.

"I had hoped," said Campe, "to have you for luncheon."

"Some other time I shall be delighted. But to-day there are some small matters which must have my attention. Good-bye, and thank you."

Kretz swung open the outer door; they crossed the courtyard, and he shot back the great bolts of the gate. The detective shook hands with Campe; to Scanlon he said:

"If it is at all possible, call upon me at ten o'clock to-morrow. I think I shall then have something to tell you in regard to the affair you spoke to me of yesterday."

"I'll be on hand," said Bat, with a nod of assurance. "Count on me."

From a window the beautiful, smiling face of Miss Knowles looked down upon them. Ashton-Kirk took off his cap, and with a nod and a little flourish he was off down the road, swinging with a long stride, and twirling his hickory stick gayly.

Next day the bell in the tower of the church next door was striking ten when the punctual Bat Scanlon presented himself at the crime specialist's door.

"Come in," said that gentleman. "You are as sharp as time itself."

As usual, he had a pile of books about him ; and the Coblenz pipe was sending its pale vapors into the room. But these were a different kind of books. Those which had been heaped about on the occasion of Mr. Scanlon's last visit were things of dreams and fanciful speculation ; but these, this morning, were keen and practical looking. The sheep binding seemed to warn off triflers ; the type seemed sharply cut and decisive. And the very pipe itself seemed to wear a purposeful air ; instead of the leisurely drawing at it that had marked the other visit, the puffs were now curt and contained a promise of other things.

Bat Scanlon seated himself in the chair he had occupied before ; and while he lighted the cigar which was presented to him, his eyes went to the print of the brown sailors peering away into the heart of the sea's mystery. And now, somehow, their attitude was changed. The mystery ahead was as complete as before ; indeed, it was, perhaps, more so ; but the brown men now seemed at ease ; to-day they did not fear the unknown ; and, as he looked closely, it even seemed that

they were pleased with the unusualness of their situation.

"Just the way I feel," Bat told himself. "Kirk's on the job and he'll fix it up as it should be. So why worry?"

Ashton-Kirk opened a drawer and took out a folded paper.

"When you called me on the telephone the other day," said he, "I at once set about looking up the Campe family history. My records had the facts up to a few years ago. But I wanted complete information, so I sent one of my men out to look them up. This is his report, brought in to me this morning."

He seated himself upon a corner of the table and unfolded the paper. Then he read:

*"Report of Later Proceedings of the Campes."*

"The family of Campe, as shown by such information as it is possible to secure from banks doing business with them, contracting firms who undertook their various enterprises and importing houses who have come into financial contact with them, have been very clever and able. They slipped naturally from the wreckage of one government into the favor of the next without loss of any sort. Their interests grew; and they seemed in a fair way to become to Central America what the Rothschilds are to Europe, when suddenly, about three years ago, things took a change. Frederic Campe, Sr., head of the house, at about

that time, met his death while on board his yacht *Conquistador*, at Vera Cruz. Something went wrong—just what it was will never be known, for no one on board escaped—and the vessel was blown to atoms. Less than six months later, William Campe, brother to the one lately dead, also met a sudden and violent end. He was attending the ceremonies held at the opening of a great concrete bridge which the family had provided the money to build, when he in some unaccountable manner fell from it and was killed.”

“Humph!” ejaculated Scanlon, and knocked the ash from his cigar.

“Henry, eldest son of Frederic, was the next to go,” read the crime specialist. “One morning, not a great while after the affair at the bridge, he was found stabbed to death in his own hallway. The nature of the wound which let out his life showed that the attack was a particularly vicious one. Some very keen and very heavy weapon must have been used, as the young man was cut open from his chest to his waist line.”

Bat Scanlon sat suddenly erect in his chair.

“Hello!” said he, in surprise. “Hello! What’s this!”

“The nature of the wound has a rather familiar sound, I think,” said Ashton-Kirk.

“A slash down the front with some very heavy and very sharp weapon,” said the big man, slowly. “That’s what young Campe got a few

nights ago. Not deep," and Bat shook his head, "but it was just such a slash as put this other one out of the running."

Ashton-Kirk resumed his reading.

"At the death of Henry, Mexico had run out of male Campes. There only remained a younger son who was then attending a university in the United States. There were several daughters, but these have resided for some years in Berlin. The greater part of the family interests in Mexico and Central America have been disposed of, and what's left is being offered for sale. From this, it seems that what remains of the family have no intention of returning south of the Rio Grande."

Here the crime specialist folded up the paper, and threw it upon the table.

"Is that all?" asked the big man.

"Yes."

"Well," declared Bat, "to my way of looking at it, it's plenty. In view of the way that man met his death in the hallway, can you figure the matters of the yacht and the bridge as accidents?"

Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"At this distance we can't say," said he. "But the deaths of the three have a stamp upon them which suggest ——"

"They were murdered," said Bat. And then,

with his eyes upon the other, he added : " But why ? "

The crime specialist slipped from the table. With the big pipe laid aside, he began to pace up and down the study.

" This matter has some very curious and interesting aspects," said he. " It is more than likely, as you suggest, that the three Campes of whom you have just heard met their deaths at the hands of assassins. But, as you also suggest, why ? "

He threw up the curtains and allowed the sun to fill the room ; the opening of the windows themselves permitted the air to rush in and pursue the smoke clouds furiously about the place. The drone of the crowds in the street, the roll of wheels, the cries of drivers to their horses, and to each other lifted to them in a confused movement of sound.

" Murder," said Ashton-Kirk, " is seldom undertaken without cause." He resumed his pacing, his hands deep in his trousers pockets. " Even the lowest type of thug, waylaying his victim in a lonely place, has the desire for money as his motive. The drunken loafer of the slums beats his wife to death because she refuses him food which he has not earned, or the price of more liquor which dulls his mind to the barest requirements of life. The masked burglar does not take life wantonly, but only when hard pressed and with the



jail staring him in the face. The poisoner is actuated by jealousy, or by the desire to remove some one who bars his way to happiness or wealth. If the Campes were murdered, there was a reason for it. And the fact that three of them have so died, and a systematic effort seems to be proceeding to bring about the death of a fourth, shows that the reason is not an individual one."

"No," agreed Bat Scanlon. "It's a family matter. It's something that has to do with them as a bunch."

"The attention of the murderer," said Ashton-Kirk, "was apparently first fixed upon the head of the house, the elder Frederic. He was blown up with his yacht. His brother William was the succeeding head. He died in a fall from a bridge. Next, the eldest son of Frederic came into control of the family finances. He was stabbed to death. The last of them all, and the present head of the house, is your friend at Schwartzberg. Beyond a doubt the eyes of the monster are now fixed upon him."

"Well?"

"It is possible," said the crime specialist, "that some sort of demand was made upon the elder Frederic. This was refused, and murder followed. Again the demand was made—again upon the head of the house—and again was refused. Once more death made its grisly appear-

ance. For the third time the request was repeated to the person in control of the family's affairs ; for the third time it was denied ; and again death followed swiftly."

"A request," said Bat Scanlon. "For what?"

Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"I don't know," said he. "And I merely mention this as a thing which might be true, understand me. I do not know that it is. But, supposing it is, perhaps your question can be answered. The business of the Campes, as a family, was money. And as the family seems to have been struck at, and not any individual, is it carrying the thing too far to think that money may form the basis of the request?"

"Not to me," replied Mr. Scanlon, promptly.

"In fact, it seems very likely, indeed."

Ashton-Kirk continued his pacing up and down. For the most part he was silent and intent, apparently thinking hard. Now and then, however, his thoughts took form in muttered words, altogether unintelligible to Scanlon, although that gentleman listened eagerly. After a time the crime specialist pressed one of the series of bell calls, and Fuller made his appearance.

"Begin at once," said Ashton-Kirk, "and put Burgess and O'Neil on the job if you need help. Pull together any facts as to the dealings of the house of Campe during the time Frederic Campe—

the one who your report says died aboard his yacht—was at the head of the concern. Go into this to the limit—don't spare trouble, as it is important. Also try and get some data as to this same Frederic Campe personally. Who were his friends? what were his habits?—what interests, financial or otherwise, did he oppose?"

"It looks like a large order," said Fuller. "I'll have to get on the ground."

"Take the next train south," directed the crime specialist. "As soon as you get anything, telegraph it in our private code."

"Right," said the assistant. "Anything more?"

"No."

Fuller left the room with hasty step; and Bat Scanlon nodded his admiration.

"You go after things with both hands in this shop," said he. "And, as I've always claimed, that's the only way to get them done."

"Our little run out of town," said Ashton-Kirk, "brought several things to my notice which singly would, perhaps, have suggested nothing; but collectively they indicated a possible condition, both picturesque and dangerous."

"We ran into a small herd of things," said Mr. Scanlon. "Just which of them do you mean?"

But Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"The indications may prove erroneous," said he. "The hour we spent among the hills around

Schwartzberg was of the sort in which the imagination operates vividly; and in such work as we are now on, care must be taken as to what is fact and what fancy. Under such influences as were then abroad, the mind strings thoughts much as a child strings beads."

He paused in his pacing and stood by the window, looking down into the shabby street. There was a tight look about the corners of his mouth; the singular eyes glittered a bit feverishly.

Up and down swarmed the alien horde in the street. The children seemed countless; the sounds and smells were thick, and of the near East.

The stands at the curbs, and at the walls of buildings were piled with wares of strange make, and with food that was questionable. Merchants in long coats, and with the ever present cigarette between their fingers, pleaded eloquently with hedging customers.

Women in bright shawls, which were pulled up about their heads and faces, huddled upon steps and peered out at the turmoil about them; the dull red walls of the buildings and their dirty windows were unpleasantly prominent in the morning sun.

Suddenly Ashton-Kirk turned upon Scanlon.

"What do you think of the Campe household?" he asked. "Take them one at a time, beginning with the lowest in importance—how do

they stand in the light of your two weeks' acquaintance with them?"

"The lowest in importance," said the big man, "would be Kretz's daughter. She's got a head that was made to forget with, and about as much character as a kitten. I've seen things duller than she is, but they were not human things. As for her mother, I've heard her speak twice—possibly three times. Each observation was pointed at her daughter, was in German, and was, from the general sound, meant to tell her exactly where she got off. But, though she might be economical as a conversationalist, she does not stint her talent as a cook. For she can and does cook with an abandon and fancy that would take the crinkles out of the most crumpled appetite. Mrs. Kretz is the sort of a woman who would greet a broken dish and the falling in of the roof with about the same display of emotion.

"Kretz himself is almost as eloquent as his wife. But though he talks little, he sees everything. Campe tells me he's been in the family for ten years or more, and he has a lot of confidence in him. As far as I can see—Kretz—I don't know. There are some things about him and his doings that I don't understand; but then I can say the same for most of the folks at the castle, if it comes down to cases."

"And the next?" asked Ashton-Kirk.

“ Well, I suppose it’s a matter of taste just who is next,” proceeded Scanlon. “ But to save any lengthy argument, suppose we say it’s Campe’s aunt, Miss Hohenlo. I don’t see much of either of the ladies of the castle, but Miss Hohenlo is the closest in that respect. As her name shows, Miss Hohenlo is a maiden ; and after one look at her face and another at her figure I don’t wonder at it. Nature seems to have jumped in between her and any chance she ever had of changing her condition ; for she’s got the finest little lot of spinster manners and ideas I ever saw in one collection. In character she’s about as colorless as water ; and she stands for about as much as a grain of rice powder on a chorus girl’s nose.

“ But the other lady is different ; you’ve seen her, and so I’ll say nothing about her looks except what I said once before, and that is, she’s a pippin ! However,” and the big man bent his brows at the crime specialist, “ she has a way with her. As a matter of fact, she has several ways, and I don’t understand any of them. Why did she drop the dish when she first heard your name ? and look as if she’d got the shock of her life ? What’s the idea of her wandering out among the hills at night ? The search-light caught her standing over Campe’s senseless body the night he was cut. And only the other night you and I saw the light pick her up once more.”

"I did not give much attention to the woman on that occasion," said Ashton-Kirk. "And so you think it was Miss Grace Knowles, do you?"

"Who else could it have been?" demanded Bat. "And who else screamed on the night Kretz met me on the stairs? And that's not all." Here the speaker leaned toward the special detective, and his voice sank lower, as though he feared to be overheard. "Last night I got a fresh slant at her. Eh? With a candle, and hesitating along the hallway. When she got to the door of the room where you saw Miss Hohenlo, she stopped and listened at the edges of it, as if she was making sure that no one was there. I guess there wasn't, for she opened the door and went in.

"I was at the end of the hall when I saw this and I waited; for somehow the thing didn't look good. Then I heard footsteps coming along the lower corridor and some one started up the lower flight of steps. Like a flash the door of the room into which Miss Knowles had gone opened; I didn't see it—I heard it; for the young lady had blown out her candle. It was Campe coming up, and he had a light. She was standing by the door with as sweet a smile on her face as you ever saw anywhere, and she gave him a lot of little nods. He was surprised to see her, but she said:

“‘I’ve just come to see if your aunt is awake. I did *so* want some one to talk to.’

“And so,” said Bat, “she knocked on the door, very gently, just as if she wasn’t already sure that no one was there. And she seemed greatly disappointed when no one answered.

“‘Talk to me,’ says Campe. You see he fell for the bunk just as easy as that. ‘Talk to me,’ says he. For when a man’s in love with a woman,” continued Mr. Scanlon, sagely, “she can put anything across on him”

“And so you think Campe is in love with Miss Knowles?”

“Up to his eyes.”

The big man laid the end of his cigar in an ash tray, and put a hand upon each knee.

“I don’t know whether you noticed it,” resumed he, “but this same Miss Knowles was peddling around a queer little line of samples yesterday while you were there. What was she hinting about? Eh? What was she saying one thing for, and meaning something else? She’s jollyng Campe, that’s plain to me; but what’s this thing she’s trying to shoulder onto the little old maid?”

“It’s a peculiar household,” said Ashton-Kirk. He went to the table and began turning the leaves of one of the books carelessly. Scanlon, glancing at it, saw an array of skulls of differing formations,



all down one of the pages. "And," resumed the crime specialist, "it will probably take some weighing and judging before we get them properly placed."

Leaving the book open, he once more thrust his hands into his pockets and resumed the pacing.

"Music," said he, "is a delightful thing. Its powers to quiet and to uplift are tremendous." There was a short pause, and then he added: "What's your opinion of the harp as an instrument?"

Mr. Scanlon was very frank.

"Now you've got me bad," said he. "All I know about it is what I heard a Sicilian do to it one season in Tucson. He was the orchestra in 'File' Brady's saloon, and picked melody out of it to accompany the ballad singers. And," here he looked shrewdly at Ashton-Kirk, "I know less about swords than you operate with both hands. As a weapon, this style of thing had gone out before I came into the desire to mix it with my fellow man."

Ashton-Kirk smiled and nodded.

"I repeat," said he, "that some of the things we heard and saw held a great deal of interest. But how are we to associate them? What possible connection has a delicate gilt harp with a mysterious noise in the night? What has a green

stone in common with a sword that was carried in the siege of Milan? And what can there be between a beautiful woman, radiant with life, and a creature three-quarters dead, who is wheeled about in a chair?"

The big, candid face of Scanlon grew stiff with amazement.

"Why, look here!" said he. "Just where does that fellow ——"

But at a gesture from the crime specialist he stopped. And once more Ashton-Kirk paused at the table; and again he began turning the leaves of the book.

"The studies of that ingenious old empiric of Antwerp, Gall, are most amusing," said he, as his eyes began to run from one pictured skull to another. "The system he worked out and which he called 'Zoonomy' is rich in suggestion, and," nodding his head, "may contain more truths than is generally supposed."

"He had something to do with skulls, I take it," said Mr. Scanlon.

"He had all to do with them in this particular regard, though his system was afterward much amplified by Spurzheim, and the Englishmen, George and Andrew Combe. His idea was that the skull's development followed that of the brain; that certain parts of the brain stood for certain faculties; if the brain were large in this faculty

the skull would show it. And in that way we were to have a very convenient method of judging the character of any particular person."

"I've heard of it," said Mr. Scanlon. "A fellow I roomed with once used to turn that trick at a quarter a throw. It was a fairly easy way of getting money, but I couldn't see very much more to it."

"You saw it practiced by a fakir," said the special detective, his eyes still upon the turning pages. "And such things offer many opportunities for crooked practitioners. But, after all, I don't think it would be at all difficult to prove that it has its basis in truth. It is a well-known fact that nations, for example, have one general type of head; and it is equally well known that the individuals of a nation have the same general tendencies."

Here he pushed the book aside and his hand went to a brace of volumes at the end of the table.

"I put in some little time last night," said he, "dipping into Humboldt and Vater. There is a vast difference between their keen, uncompromising intellects and the credulous minds of Gall and his followers. And yet it is a bit startling to trace a line between them which runs ——"

But here he looked up and met the inquiring look of the big man with a smile.

"You're having a peep behind the scenes,"

he said. "You're seeing me deep in a mass of preliminary speculations, and not at all sure as to where they are to lead."

"But," said Mr. Scanlon, with confidence, "you see something."

"Not very clearly," and the singular eyes glittered with interest, "but I think I see the mist breaking away at some points, and before to-day is done I may be able to get my ranges. Perhaps by the time I get Fuller's second report I'll have enough data to finish the case at a blow."

"Fine," said Mr. Scanlon. He got up and shook the crime specialist by the hand. "That makes me feel good. You see," earnestly, "I'm as keen on this thing as if it was my own—maybe more so. This boy is hard pressed, and has called on me for help. I don't want to fail him. I don't want it proven that he's made a mistake."

"We'll do our best," said Ashton-Kirk, "to pull him through."

The big man's face wore an anxious look.

"But just where do I come in?" he asked. "While you are deep in the struggle to put this thing right, what am I to do?"

"That," said Ashton-Kirk, "is exactly what I wanted to speak of. Your part in this affair is to be important. Watch! Sleep—as some of the naturalists say the wild things do—with your eyes

open    Things are apt to happen inside Schwartzberg."

"Inside," said Scanlon. "But what about outside?"

The other smiled.

"Why, as to that," said he, "suppose you leave the outside to me."

## CHAPTER VII

### SHOWS HOW MR. SCANLON MET THE MAN WITH THE SOFT VOICE

IT was late in the afternoon when Bat Scanlon got off the train at Marlowe Furnace and struck down the little road toward the covered bridge.

Upon the west bank he held to the regular road toward Schwartzberg ; and he had gone perhaps half the distance when he heard hoof beats behind him ; turning, he recognized Grace Knowles, mounted upon a powerful gray horse.

She waved her whip to him, smilingly, and as she came up, drew in her mount.

“ It’s a very pleasant afternoon,” said she.

Bat cast his eyes first at one point and then at another. The question, it would appear, was a weighty one and must be carefully considered. The sun touched the hilltops with a dull gold ; the sky was filled with sailing ribbons of white ; and the breeze was bracing and free.

He nodded.

“ Pretty good,” said he. “ Reminds me of some of the afternoons we used to have in the foot-hills

when they were dragging the railroads over them, and through them, and alongside of them."

"Mr. Campe has been telling me of some of your experiences," said she, her beautiful face filled with interest. "It must have been a very wild life, there in the West in those days."

"It was all of that," replied Bat, as he trudged along beside the gray. "Wild is the word that just fits it. A fellow had to sleep with his guns in his hands and a call for help in his mouth. We had some fine, enterprising lads out that way. They'd go for anything, and stop at nothing. But," with a sigh, "it was tame enough before I pulled out. Things seemed to have shifted, somehow."

"In what way?" asked Miss Knowles.

"The West having taken to growing grain and feeding sheep, the East seems to be providing the excitement necessary for the country's good," stated the big man, calmly. "For example: I've seen more little proceedings around this village of Marlowe Furnace than I've seen in some frontier towns with the hardest kind of names."

"You refer to what happened yesterday in the vaults," said Miss Knowles. "Yes, that must have been quite thrilling."

"It was also a bit dangerous," said Bat, stoically. "I don't object to being shot at, mind you; but I do want to see the party that's got the

matter in hand. This having surprise packages dealt one in the dark is carrying the matter too far."

Miss Knowles smiled.

"No doubt," she said, very calmly, "it seems rather awkward." There was a pause, and she stroked the horse's neck with her whip. "I suppose your friend was also startled," she said.

"Almost into fits," stated Bat. "He's a fellow, you see, who's not used to such attentions; and to have them forced on him suddenly in that way was too much for him."

Miss Knowles still smiled.

"That is really too bad," she said. "Being so abruptly treated," inquiringly, "I suppose he will not come again?"

"You never can tell," replied Scanlon. "Sometimes people take things to heart; and again they laugh them off, like a pine-snake does his worn-out jacket. You might never catch him within ten miles of Schwartzberg again; and then he might walk in on us this very night."

The smile vanished from the beautiful face; and the blue eyes looked at the big man steadily.

"To-night," she said, and there was a catch in her voice. Then, quietly enough, "I don't think Mr. Campe expects him."

"Mr. Ashton-Kirk is not the fellow to stand back for a little thing like that," remarked Bat



Scanlon. "As a matter of fact, the time that he's not expected is more than likely to be the time he'd pick."

From somewhere over the rolling country a bell struck the hour. At once the girl gathered her reins tighter.

"I must hurry on," she said. She waved her whip as the gray struck into a long, easy gallop; and away they went down the road toward the castle. The thoughtful eyes of Mr. Scanlon followed her until both horse and rider were hidden behind the next rise of ground.

"She knows Kirk," thought he with a twist at the corner of his mouth, and a sharp nod of the head. "She knew his name as soon as she heard it, and she guessed what he came for. And now she's anxious to know when he's coming again, is she? When I hint that he might bob up to-night she takes fire, and goes off like a shot." Here his eyes snapped sharply and he went on: "And what is the answer to so much agitation? Is something doing for this P. M.? Does the beautiful Miss Knowles know it; does she think the horning in of a party of A-K's intelligence might have awkward results?"

As he proceeded along the road, Mr. Scanlon drew a tobacco pouch from his pocket, also a packet of small papers, and formally rolled himself a cigarette. With this properly lighted, he

went calmly on, his brows level and his expectations at their highest.

"At first," meditated he, "I took this thing in another way. It was all worry. But now that I've shifted the responsibility to Kirk, I see it differently. It's an experience—an adventure. And, believe me, I'm going to get out of it all there is in it."

When he reached the rise which the girl had ridden over, he sighted a small road which his tramping trips had told him led down to the river. By the side of this road, writing in a leather-covered book, was a man. He was a fat man and soft-looking.

"Hello," said Mr. Scanlon, "who's this?"

With much industry, the stranger wrote in the little book; and never once did he lift his head. Scanlon halted.

"There is something tells me," was his thought, "that I have met with this party upon some past occasion. But where?"

The little lane was one of the retiring sort; it had fallen oak leaves covering it to the depth of one's shoe tops; the crooked rail fences gave it a homely look.

The man with the book paused in his writing, and then went carefully over what had been done; it did not seem to please him, and so he began some alterations in the entry.

Then, glancing up, he sighted Scanlon, and moved toward him softly. When he spoke his voice was also soft.

"I am a stranger," said he. "And I fear I've lost my way. Can you direct me to the station at Marlowe Furnace?"

And with that Bat had him placed! There was something reminiscent in the combination of softness, even at first glance; but the mention of the railroad station placed the tag upon him. It was the man whom the old station agent had described—the man of the bridge—the man who had given him the queer green stone.

Quietly the big man blew out a thin spiral of smoke.

"You go down this road," said he, "until you come to a bridge with a lid on it. This you cross. Ten minutes further on, and there you are."

The soft-looking man closed the leather-covered book; then he put it away carefully in one pocket, and the pencil in another.

"I am extremely obliged to you," he said, gently. "Your directions, I think, will be very easy to follow." He stroked his white soft chin with a hand that was equally thick and soft and white; and his eyes searched Scanlon's face. "You live hereabouts, I suppose?"

"For the time being," replied Bat, evenly

"It's a nice kind of a place, and I'm sticking around a while."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," observed the soft man. "You are right. It is a nice place. Very picturesque, and also very historical, I understand." He waved one hand in a stubby gesture toward the north. "I came that way. And just above I saw a most astonishing house."

"Big one?" asked Bat. "Things on top?"

"A very big one," agreed the other. "Very big, indeed; and, as you say, with things on the top."

"That's Schwartzberg," said Bat. "A German castle, only not in Germany. The rule is to plant them along the Rhine, I believe, but the fellow who put this one in must have thought one river as good as another. And I agree with him."

The soft man laughed. If anything, his laugh was the softest thing about him. As Bat listened to the laugh, and looked at the man's eyes, which were green and cold and steady, he felt his scalp prickle with something like dread. But he puffed quietly at his cigarette; and, from his manner, such a feeling was no nearer to him than the poles.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said the soft-looking man. "He was quite right. It is very stately—most charming, and adds to the picturesqueness of the section." From where they stood the

towers of Schwartzberg were to be seen through the naked trees ; and one fat, white finger pointed to them. "The moon, now," said the man, "must play about those portions of the building very strikingly when it is at its full."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Bat.

"In fact," said the other, "night hereabouts must be very different in many ways."

Bat seemed to take this under advisement.

"As to that," said he, "I don't know but what I agree with you. It *is* different."

The soft man moved softly nearer ; there was an eagerness under his smooth manner that was not lost upon Scanlon.

"I love the night," said he. "It is rather an old-fashioned thing to do, I admit ; but I love it, for all. In these times when the electric lights have robbed the heavens of their stars, and put out the very moon, there are few who admire the night. But I love to walk in it, to watch the canopy, to reflect upon the vastness of the universe."

"I was raised in Kansas," said Bat, "and in the days when there was no end of stars, plenty of moon, and lots of chance for them to show themselves. But to me, night was made to sleep in, and the only use I had for either moon or stars was to see my way home by, if I happened to be out after hours."

"Is it possible that you never walk out—here?" The soft man seemed appalled, but the cold green eyes were as watchful as those of a cat. "Is it possible that you never hear—from your window, perhaps—the whispering of the night?"

Bat laughed.

"Whispering," said he. "Well, if that's whispering, let me say that the night has some well developed voice. Up here," he added, "it's the greatest place for thunder you ever saw. It comes up when you never expect it."

"Thunder!" said the soft man; and the cold eyes seemed to smile.

Bat nodded.

"Pretty loud, too," said he. "And as for taking little walks at night—well, that's hardly the thing to do hereabouts. You see, there's a lot of vags about; and they make it a little dangerous. A friend of mine up at the big place you were just talking about," and Scanlón gestured toward the castle, "is kept on the jump all the time by them. They're very forward; even undertake a little housebreaking now and then, he says."

The soft man caressed one hand with the other.

"Ah, well," he sighed, "everything has its drawbacks. I suppose it's too much to hope for complete tranquillity. I thank you, sir, for your courtesy. Straight on, did you say? and then

across the bridge? Again, thank you You are very kind."

And so the soft-looking man moved softly down the road, and Bat stood looking after him from under puckered brows.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TELLS HOW THE NIGHT BREEZE BLEW FROM THE NORTHWEST

AT dinner that evening Scanlon was surprised to find Miss Hohenlo. She wore a faded little smile and nodded girlishly to the trainer.

"It is such a task for me to dress," she told him. "That's why I so seldom come down of an evening. But the coming of your friend yesterday, and what Frederic has been telling me about him is quite exciting."

Bat raised his brows inquiringly.

"Telling you about him?" said he.

"You know he mentioned his interest in old Count Hohenlo," said Campe. "My aunt is pleased with that."

"I see," said Bat, and felt more at ease. Happening to turn his eyes in the midst of his complacency, he found those of Miss Knowles fixed upon him observantly.

"Your friend, Mr. Ashton-Kirk, must be a man of much learning," said she.

"He has so many books that it'd give you a headache just to look at them," said Bat. "As a



child, they fed him culture with a spoon. He knows more inside stuff about people whom ordinary people never heard of than you'd think could be found out in a half dozen lifetimes."

"How very interesting," said Miss Knowles.

"Only to-day he was overhauling a group of musty old fellows who, so it would seem, put in their lives poking around among skulls."

"Oh!" Miss Knowles said this, and her hands went up in a pretty gesture, apparently of dismay. But Bat, somehow, was quite sure it was to hide the expression that swept across her face. However, he went on, calmly:

"To find a dome that was fore and aft, or to put the tape around one that leaned to one side, was life's extreme limit for those chaps. They even seem to have written books about bumps which any fairly strong man could pack into the thumb of a lady's glove."

"And is your friend also interested in this study?" asked the girl.

"Only a little," replied Scanlon. "He does not make a practice of any one thing, as a matter of fact. He's the kind of a fellow who has a great many cards up his sleeve; and so he always has one to play when it's wanted."

"That," said Miss Knowles, "is clever of him."

"And it's so unusual to find a man interested in biographical bypaths," said Miss Hohenlo. "The

Count, you know, figured largely in the court of Frederic the Great ; he was a friend to Voltaire and other men of note, and gave his sword and his genius for the freedom of these states."

"Sure," said Bat. "He's one that slipped by me ; but I can appreciate him for all that."

The delicate hands went out in a gesture extremely girlish ; the spinster's faded face was full of rapture.

"It is really remarkable how things come about," she said, "and, somehow, I feel that the visit of Mr. Ashton-Kirk will result in something."

"I'm sure it will," said Bat, calmly.

"Frederic has been gathering documents for a long time," she went on. "I have a number of journals containing data of a most interesting character, and there are letters without number from historical personages. These together will show the beautiful fulness of the Count's life. When your friend comes again, we must not fail to call his attention to them."

"On the next visit he'll not miss a thing," stated Scanlon, confidently.

As they arose from the table Miss Hohenlo went to a window, raised it and looked out over the country, now dimming under the hand of dusk.

"If Schwartzberg had nothing else in its favor," she said, vivaciously, "we could always fall back upon the glorious weather. And to-

night," with a gesture of the beautiful hands, "is more than usually splendid."

As she stood there, framed in the high window, the spinster looked even more angular than Scanlon had supposed her to be. Her faded hair threw back nothing that the lamplight gave it; her neck was thin, her arms were long and awkward. Near her stood the stately Miss Knowles, magnificent in her youth, her height, her long soft lines. The girl's complexion was more like cream and roses than ever; the splendid crown of yellow hair was built up in a shining mass.

Striking as was her beauty, and much as he would have liked to stand and admire it, Bat Scanlon's interest was called to something else. The actions of Miss Hohenlo at the window were commonplace enough, and yet, somehow, Miss Knowles seemed to attach much importance to them. The girl stood talking with Campe. Their tones were low; and the young man's face had lost the strained look. The fear, which usually held its place so fixedly in his eyes, was gone for the time; and an eagerness had replaced it.

"Fine for him!" was Bat's mental comment. "If it don't do anything else, the entertainment will rest him up for a little, and that's something. And," here his mouth twisted slightly at the corner, "the lady is as interested as he is, but not at the same thing."

There was a subtle something going on which the big man did not grasp ; that it was proceeding was plain enough ; but its meaning was lost upon him.

"I'm muffing it," was his thought. "Right under it, too. It must be," sadly, "that the grand stand's too big ; a minor leaguer never does get a right slant at anything until he's out of the bush for a season. Kirk ought to be here."

"How deep the shadows grow on the east of the hills," spoke Miss Hohenlo, sentimentally. "I love to watch them as they thicken and lengthen in the evening." She leaned further from the window, a hand outstretched. "There is only the faintest of breezes," she continued, "so little that one can scarcely detect its direction."

At this, the watching Scanlon saw the blue eyes of Miss Knowles narrow ; the look of interest upon her face deepened.

"Now it's the wind," said Bat, to himself. "And I am up to my eyebrows for sure."

"Frederic," and Miss Hohenlo turned to her nephew, "see if you can catch the wind's direction."

Obediently the young man left the side of Miss Knowles.

"It's from the northwest, I think," said he

"Yes, look there. Those tall birches are stirring; you can see their tops against the sky."

"What wonderful sight you have, my dear," said his aunt, as she fixed her eye-glasses upon her insignificant nose, and strove to see the tree tops he mentioned. "You must inherit it from your father's family, for ours have never seen very clearly." She looked out into the dusk with much affectation of fear. "Oh, dear, isn't it very lonely out there?" she said. "Darkness does make such a change, doesn't it, Mr. Scanlon?"

"One time," said Mr. Scanlon, "when I had nothing else to do, I took a short whirl at a theatrical enterprise in Dodge City. And that showed me something fresh about the effects of darkness. Flood the stage with light and you couldn't stir a thrill in the audience, no matter to what histrionic lengths you went. But put on the shadows and you began to get them; shut off the lights altogether, and you could feel things creeping right over the footlights."

"Could you really?" Miss Hohenlo was extremely juvenile in her gestures of terror. "It must have been dreadful!" Then to her nephew: "You are quite sure it's from the northwest, Frederic?"

"Yes, quite sure," replied the young man a trifle impatiently. He had gone back to the girl

once more and taken up the low-pitched conversation.

"Perhaps," said Miss Hohenlo, "it might change."

Young Campe did not hear this, so Mr. Scanlon said, reassuringly :

"Not to-night it won't. It'll stick around that quarter till sunup, anyway."

"Isn't it delightful to understand the laws of Nature?" said Miss Hohenlo. "I never had a head for it, really."

A very few moments later she moved out of the room ; Scanlon, with a nod and a half spoken excuse, left the girl and Campe together. Descending the stone stairs, he let himself out into the courtyard, and lighting a cigar he began walking up and down.

The square figure of the German sergeant-major was to be seen upon the wall ; there was something intent in his attitude, indistinct though he was.

"A good watch-dog," mused Bat, as he puffed away. "But, dash it, I don't get him ! A fellow like that is useful if you know he belongs to you ; but when you get to thinking that he might ——" Here the big man paused and took the cigar from his mouth. "What happened to that lamp in the vaults yesterday?" he demanded of himself. "What did it smash for? It wasn't till after-

ward that there were any pistol shots." He snapped his finger and thumb with a sharp popping sound. "I wonder if Kirk thought of that," he said in a low tone. "I'll mention it to him when I see him."

With the cigar burning freely, and his hands clasped behind him, Scanlon trudged up and down.

"Wind from the northwest, eh?" thought he. "That's a funny kind of thing. There was something to it, though. I could read it in that girl's face as plainly as I can read print. The old one seemed to want to be sure just how the wind blew; and the young one seemed interested in the desire. Wonder what kind of a little game it is, and how does it work into the bigger one that's going on?"

He mused and smoked and paced, but the affair presented no aspects at all understandable. Finally, in exasperation, Bat began a conversation with the man on the wall.

"Nice night," he called.

"Yes," came the brief reply.

"Think it'll rain?" asked Bat.

"The wind's from the northwest," stated the sergeant-major.

Bat bit at his cigar viciously. Though not able to give any good reason for it, he wished it would select some other quarter.

"The northwest!" said he, to himself. "What the dickens is there about the northwest that ——" here he stopped, a thought taking shape in his mind. "I'll go out and give it the once over," said he, gravely. "There might be something cooking, out that way; and if no one's there it might boil over."

He called once more to Kretz.

"Hello," answered the man.

"Come down," requested Bat, "and open the gate. I want to go out."

The sergeant-major descended from the wall.

"To go out," stated he, "is not wise. Outside there is danger—from the tramps."

"Unbolt the gate," said Bat, serenely. "I rather like tramps. In fact, one of the regrets of my young life is that I've met so few of them."

"In the cellar," said Kretz, as he shot back a bolt, "they fired at us."

"Maybe," suggested Bat, "that volley ran them out of ammunition."

"You do not know how much they are to be feared," said the German, stubbornly. "I have served. I have seen danger. But," and Bat saw his head shake, "never any like this."

"To-night," said the big man, "I feel like taking a chance. Stick around, will you, so you can let me in when I get back."

Reluctantly the sergeant-major opened the gate;



then he closed it promptly and Bat, from the outside, heard him refastening it.

"Is it that he is anxious that nothing should happen to me ; or is it that he wants nothing to happen to something else ?" reflected Bat, as he threw away the cigar, and stood by the gate looking away into the night. "Little anxieties like that might work both ways, as I've seen to my cost."

Slowly and quietly he passed around the wall, and at a point overlooking the northwest he paused.

"The Potomac at its quietest never had anything on this," said he, gently. "It's as peaceful, apparently, as a pastoral on a post-card. All it needs is a section of moon, a fleecy cloud, and a happy pair of lovers."

It was a serene, quiet night ; the wind from the northwest was but the merest puff ; the shadowy hills lay long and looming on every side ; the stars were few and seemed very far away.

"It's on these still nights, though," ruminated Bat, "that things that make a noise usually have their beginnings. Some wise old lad, in the days gone by, came through with a remark about the calm before the storm ; and as an observer, I'll say that he held aces. Because it's always been my experience that your man always takes his

longest rest before he comes at you with both hands swinging. So the right dope must be: the quieter the night, the wider you should keep your eyes open."

Just then he turned his head and looked up at the castle. At an open window he saw something move. It was a woman in white—a tall woman. Bat's straining eyes made her out.

"The young one," said he, softly.

The window was dark, but the white of the gown was distinct; and the outlines, vague though they were, were unmistakable. And she seemed to be looking out over the swelling country toward the northwest.

"There are happenings to be expected, as I thought," murmured Mr. Scanlon. "Doings are being started just as sure as she stands in that window."

He turned his eyes away from the shadowy window and toward the equally shadowy quarter which held the girl's attention. For a space all was alike; it seemed evenly dark. Then he began to perceive points of light between the hills; these were low places in the western sky which the night had not stained completely black. Against one of these, Bat, as he looked, caught a movement; some slinking, peculiar figures crossed it and were at once swallowed up

**“Right,” muttered Mr. Scanlon, grimly. “Just hold that for a little, and I’ll be with you.”**

**And with that he quietly descended the slope of the hill upon which Schwartzberg stood, and made off into the darkness.**

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH SOME THINGS ARE DONE AND SOME OTHERS ARE SAID

AS Bat went cautiously onward, the place where he had seen the movement marked in his mind, he was aware of a glimmering of light over his shoulder. Turning his head he saw the rim of the moon pushing its way above the trees behind him.

"Hello!" said he. "Here's our friend with the smiling face, and I don't know whether I'm glad to see him or not." He stood gazing at the disc, which mounted rapidly, throwing its cold rays along the hills. "Anyway," continued Bat, philosophically, "I caught him over my right shoulder, and that means a run of luck. So with things fixed in my favor, I'd better go on."

Keeping as much in the shadow as possible, he went his way. After a time he drew near to a hill, higher than any of those about it, from which he had more than once admired the ancient looking towers of Schwartzberg.

"I think I'd better top that," he muttered, "and take an observation. If there's any one moving

around out here I'll be able to spot him in the moonshine."

Carefully he ascended the rather steep side of the hill ; the lessons of his youth, when he trailed a Geronimo in the southwest or stalked " Billy-the-Kid " were as clear in his mind as ever.

" But the joints don't work the same," was the big man's mental complaint. " They creak enough to waken any fairly light sleeper, if there were such camped in this vicinity."

He came to the top of the hill, and standing in the shadow of a tree, looked about. The long, trailing moonbeams and the dusky shadows lay side by side, as far as he could see. There was a path which wound up the west side of the hill, down on the east and away toward the river ; as Bat looked westward along this it disappeared in the shadows which clung to the slope. And he heard a sound.

" Voices," said he. Then, after a moment, " Voices and wheels."

Quietly he waited and listened. Away to the east he saw the ghostlike loom of Schwartzberg in the moonlight ; the breeze stirred the bare limbs of the trees under which he stood.

Bat smiled as he looked up at the branches.

" Still from the northwest," said he. " Well, hold to it. Maybe you'll bring us something."

Nearer and nearer came the sound of wheels—

singularly light wheels. And the stumbling hoofs of the usual horse were absent.

"Can it be some one doing a little hill climbing on a bicycle?" was the big man's silent question. "If so, he has an original turn of mind."

But in a few moments more a shape emerged from the shadows, coming up the hill. It was a rolling chair; in it was a muffled figure and behind it labored a squat, strong looking servant.

"By Jove!" was Bat's mental exclamation. "It's the sick fellow from the inn."

Upon reaching the crest of the hill the chair stopped. The squat servant spoke to the invalid inquiringly, but in a strange tongue.

"Lift me up," directed the man in the chair.

The stocky one did as directed; the patient turned his face toward the castle, and his eyes remained fixed upon it for a long time. The breeze moved softly; there was scarcely a sound to be heard.

"He's been here before," mused Bat, from the shadow of the tree. "And it's not been for air, either." Then Ashton-Kirk and his array of pictured skulls occurred to the watcher, and he gazed at the peculiar frontal formation of the sick man with attention. "I wonder," was his next thought, "how Kirk doped it out that this fellow was in on our affair? and I also wonder what a skull with a flat place in front's got to do with it?"

After a time Bat saw that the pale hands of the invalid were moving as though he were fumbling impatiently with his wrappings. Then, for a space, he'd remain perfectly still ; as the pale moon shone directly upon his face, Bat noted that his eyes during these periods of stillness were closed. But once more they'd open and again the wasted hands would begin to stir in the same impatient way. During the spaces in which the sick man sat with closed eyes, the watcher often saw his face twitch suddenly ; and once he laughed out, clear and loud.

For the space of half an hour this continued ; then there was a long period during which the sick one sat as though he were thinking. Then he spoke quietly to his servant ; promptly the man lowered him to a reclining position, turned the chair about and wheeled it carefully away in the direction from which they came.

Amazed, Bat stood beneath the friendly tree.

"Well," said he, "I wonder what's all that? There is something on the range, that's sure ; but as far as my memory goes it's the queerest bit of cookery I ever witnessed. There he sits with his eyes shut, and makes faces at the moon. And the lad that pushes him around instead of putting in a call for an ambulance seems to think it a perfectly natural proceeding."

Scanlon gazed once more in the direction of

Schwartzberg ; a spot of yellow light winked here and there from a window ; but otherwise the great place, lit as it was by the moon, seemed paler and more ghostly than ever.

"If that was a winter moon, and there was snow on the ground, and the Christmas bells were ringing in the distance," mused Bat, "I'd understand why I feel as I do. Those trees over there would be the Black Forest ; there would be a small bright place among them showing the charcoal burners at work ; and in a couple of minutes along would come a little old man with a white beard and a bundle of faggots on his back. Then I'd know I was six years old and reading a story-book. But being a man and grown to some size, I'm up in the air."

He stepped out from the shadow of the tree, and throwing his arms wide, yawned luxuriously. Then he realized that several men stood beside him.

"Hello !" said Bat, and brought the yawn to an abrupt termination. "How are you ?"

One was the drawn-looking man whom he and Ashton-Kirk had seen at the inn ; the other was the brisk little physician whom they had seen upon the same occasion.

The drawn-looking man stood with stooped shoulders and regarded Bat with wondering eyes. Then he coughed into a handkerchief.



"It's a very brilliant night," suggested he.

"Great!" replied Bat.

The little physician fixed his eye-glasses firmly upon his nose.

"It is a night," stated he, "for being outdoors. As a matter of fact, any night, or any day, are excellent for that purpose. The warm-blooded animal requires great quantities of those forces which the air holds for his use; and to get them he must go where it is. Otherwise he'll be ill."

"That sounds like a very good argument," observed Bat, calmly.

"As a rule," stated the doctor, and he regarded Bat through his lenses, "my patients resent the idea of outdoors. They look at it askance. There is the suggestion of hardship in the mere idea. They want to be coddled in a room full of poisonous vapors." Still he looked at the big man fixedly; then he continued, "You are not of sickly habit, I think, and so you require no urging to take the air."

"Not a bit," replied Scanlon. "To-night, as a matter of fact," his mind running back to the words of Kretz, "I was strongly urged to stay indoors."

The drawn man coughed; he looked extremely fragile in the pale light; his face was bloodless, and his eyes had a feverish glint.

"In the main, the doctor is correct in his obser-

ventions," said he. "But, for all, I can't help thinking there *are* times when one should stay inside."

Bat waited a moment, expecting a protest from the physician; but none came; that gentleman was engaged with the moonlit landscape.

"And such times?" asked Bat. "Just what are they like?"

The drawn man wiped his lips, and his thin, bowed shoulders shrugged.

"Perhaps one's own discretion is best as to that," said he, mildly. "But, for the sake of an example, a skipper does not venture to sea in the face of a storm; a mountaineer keeps from the passes in the season of snows; a careful man does not force his way into those things which do not concern him."

"I get you," said Bat, thoughtfully. "But I also see some holes in your argument. It's not nearly so good as the doctor's spiel for fresh air. The skipper, if he's on his job and has the craft, has no right to let a blow keep him in bed; and I've seen real two-handed lads hold to the passes in all weathers. So far as the careful man is concerned—well, different people have different ideas about what makes up a man of that kind. Your notion of one seems to be a man who wouldn't take a chance except in his own affairs. But, in my little book, he's written down as one who'd

think his friend's affair just as important—and he'd be just as anxious to set it right."

"I think," said the doctor, turning, "we'd better make our way down to the road. The moon, in a few moments, will be under the clouds, and the path is rather steep."

The drawn man coughed and nodded to Mr. Scanlon.

"Good-night," said he. "Now that you *are* out," and he smiled disagreeably, "I trust you'll enjoy yourself."

"Thanks," replied the big man, coolly. "I've always had kind of a knack of doing that; so I shouldn't wonder if I did."

## CHAPTER X

### SHOWS HOW MRS. KRETZ SPOKE HER MIND

BAT SCANLON stood for a space under the neighborly tree ; he could hear the drawn man coughing away into the gloom at the foot of the hill.

"Now," observed he, "am I indeed over my head. Not only have we one man in this little matter who is so far through that he must be shoved along in a chair, but here comes another who goes wheezing around on one lung and throwing hints of a threatening nature."

He slipped an automatic pistol from his hip pocket—a black, bulky, deadly thing ; and he smoothed it with a feeling of satisfaction.

"Hints are all very well," he went on ; "but they never did any harm, and they never got anybody anything. Doing's what counts ; and all I've got to say is, let somebody start doing something I don't like."

Thinking it just as well to move from the spot he then occupied, Bat, pistol in hand, made his way along the crest of the hill and struck into a path which was to some extent shaded from the moon's rays. He had a very clear recollection of

the brisk rattle of shots in the vaults on the day before, and he had no desire to court another such.

But he picked his way along through the rising ground without mischance; the river gleamed coldly and smoothly; the walls and towers of Schwartzberg looked darker at close hand, and lost the ghostly, transparent quality which they had taken from the distance. Bat was somewhat disappointed.

"Here I take a gentleman's promise—for that's what it really was—of some entertainment. I even think enough of it to draw a gun, and pick the covered spots. And now there's nothing doing. What the dickens is the world coming to when a fellow can't ——"

There was a loud splash from the river close by; looking quickly in that direction Bat saw a bulky form stumbling about in the shallows under a bank. Two other forms instantly appeared and steadied the burly one; then all disappeared like a flash.

"The curtain," observed Bat, grimly, "is a little late in rising; but it seems we're going to have a show after all."

Holding to the shadow thrown by the high wall, he made his way cautiously toward the spot. On the edge of the shadow he paused, but there was no sound; so, with his automatic held ready,

he stepped out into the light and advanced toward the bank. A broken place was plain ; but no one was in sight.

"The big fellow stood too close to the edge ; then the thing caved in and let him down into the water," reasoned Bat. "But," and his gaze went about, "what's become of him and the parties who offered the helping hand in his time of need ?"

The river bank was clear of all obstructions for some distance above and below Schwartzberg ; the moonlight flooded it ; there was no place where any one could hide.

"That being the case, and the prowling parties not being in sight, I think I'll step back where I can't be so readily seen," said the big man.

He had turned about and was moving away from the river when a rifle sounded ; clear against the moonlit sky he made out Kretz upon the wall.

"Hello !" said Scanlon, his hands at his mouth like a megaphone. "That'll be about all of that."

The sergeant-major lowered his gun, and stood looking down ; and within a few minutes the big man was at the gate and hammering to be let in.

Kretz admitted him, sullen-faced and silent.

"Suppose you always take a look," spoke Scanlon, after the gate had been closed and fastened, "a good look, mind you, before you cut loose with that gun of yours. And let this be especially the case when I'm known to be outside."

"Twice to-night have I seen people near the river before I saw you. Each time I called, but they said nothing. The third time I fired."

"And *I* just happened along in time to be the goat," grumbled Bat. Then, with a sharp side glance at the sergeant-major's grim face, he added mentally, as he turned away, "That is, if you *didn't know* who it was."

Inside he found the room where he usually spent the evenings with Campe deserted. But from another apartment the voice of Miss Knowles was heard laughing, and that of Campe answered with much animation.

"Oh, come now," said Mr. Scanlon; "if it was somebody other than that blonde girl who was with him I'd say that this wasn't half bad."

An atmosphere of change was about the rooms which had been so gloomy; for the first time since he had been there, fear was sharing the center of the stage with something else.

"If I'd only thought of Ashton-Kirk sooner," said Bat, "the whole thing might have been straightened out by now. His just coming here for an hour, and Campe not even knowing who he was, has put a new face on things."

He wandered about among the lower rooms for a time, and finally began to run through the books in the library.

But none of them pleased him, for it seemed

a time for action ; so shutting the bookcase door, he turned away ; and then he saw Kretz's daughter beckoning to him.

" Eh ? " said he, staring.

" My mother," said the girl, stolidly. " She is in the kitchen. She wants you."

Then she vanished. For a few moments Mr. Scanlon continued his stare—but now at the empty doorway. Then with the little twist at the corner of his mouth, and with something like interest in his eyes, he made his way toward the kitchen.

The lamps, hanging from the beamed ceiling, threw but a dim light about the huge room ; a sullen fire burned in the fireplace ; the copper vessels gleamed dully. Upon a rush-bottomed chair near the blaze sat Mrs. Kretz. In her strong hands were some long steel needles, and she was knitting a stocking of blue wool. She nodded to Scanlon as he entered.

" Lena," she said to the girl, " get a chair."

A second rush-bottomed chair was brought forward by the girl, who then retired to a little distance and also took up the knitting of a stocking of blue yarn—evidently the fellow to the one her mother was engaged upon.

" My husband," spoke Mrs. Kretz, " is outside. He is watching. He will not be in for some time."



Bat nodded.

"And," continued the woman, "while he is not here, I will have some talk with you."

"Sure," said Mr. Scanlon.

"In this house I have been since spring," said Mrs. Kretz. "Was it in April, Lena?"

"It was in April," agreed Lena.

"Since spring," said Mrs. Kretz. "And I am afraid."

The interest in Mr. Scanlon's eyes deepened.

"Of what?" he asked.

But the woman gazed at him with an expression even more wooden than her daughter.

"I don't know." She laid the knitting on the hearth beside her and folded her hands in her lap. "My husband knows. But my husband never speaks of things to me. He does not trust women," simply. "But I am afraid. And Lena is afraid."

Mr. Scanlon leaned forward.

"It isn't only that something is going on which you don't understand that makes you afraid."

The woman considered this word by word and then shook her head.

"No," she said; "there is more."

"Something has happened—you've seen it—maybe more than once," suggested Bat.

The big man had a pretty clear belief that for a guest to endeavor to worm things out of his host's

servants was not altogether decent ; but in the present case he felt that the attempt was justified.

"There have been many things happened," spoke the woman. "They began when we first came, and they have never stopped."

She sat looking at Bat for a moment, then she proceeded :

"Do you know why you are here?"

Bat nodded.

"I've never been told, but I've kind of guessed my way through it."

"They are afraid to tell," said Mrs. Kretz. "They fear those outside there ; and they also fear the police."

"Huh !" said Mr. Scanlon.

There was a long period of silence, for he felt that it were best to let her go her own way.

"For the people outside they watch," said Mrs. Kretz, at length. "Always outside. But," and the strong hands knotted together suddenly and her voice sank to a whisper, "who watches inside?"

"Inside?" said Bat, quietly. "Do we need a watch inside? Are we not all friends in Schwartzberg?"

Here the girl laughed, though she did not look up from her work. And the laugh was one not pleasant to hear.

"You do not know," said Mrs. Kretz, and she

shook her head. "You do not see. One night since you came," and here her voice was lowered once more, "a woman screamed. And a shot was fired. Do you remember?"

"I heard both," said Bat. "But I don't know the reason for either."

"Lena was sick—with her tooth," said Mrs. Kretz. "I went to speak to my husband. I saw the door of the vault standing open. And beside it was Miss Knowles, the key in her hand. I knew something was about to happen; I ran to the door to close it. Then the shot came—from below; she screamed; I closed and made fast the door."

"Well?"

"She is of the family," said Mrs. Kretz, "and so I never knew how she lied herself out of it."

"You feel sure she opened the door, eh?" The woman nodded. "What for, do you suppose?"

"To allow some one below to come up. But that thing is not all. Why does she walk about in the corridors at night? What does she do outside when all should be asleep but the dogs?"

"You saw her one night," said Lena, speaking suddenly. "The night Mr. Campe was hurt."

"Yes," said Bat.

"On that same night," spoke Mrs. Kretz, "I was arranging something in the large room where

the pictures are. There was only one small light burning. I finished my work, and stood by a window, looking out. There are long curtains at the window, and these hid me. I felt them stir, as if in a draught; and I knew the door of the room had opened. I turned and looked. Miss Knowles had come in. She crossed the floor very softly and carefully, and stooped quite near to me where the great sword hangs between the windows. She stood looking at this strangely; then she reached up and took it down. And with it hidden as much as her wraps would hide it, she went away."

"Well?" asked Bat, quietly. But there was eagerness in his eyes.

"It was some hours after that when the great light flashed and we saw you come staggering along with Mr. Campe on your back." There was a pause and the woman's head rocked from side to side. "When he lay wounded out there in the darkness, she stood beside him. Didn't you find them so?"

"Yes."

"I saw the wound. It was I that washed and dressed it. A great long one, not deep, but fearful when you thought what it might have been," Again she paused, and looked steadily at Scanlon. "It was just such a cut as one could make with a very long and very heavy weapon," she said. "A

weapon like the sword which hangs between the windows."

Bat caught his breath.

"No!" said he, appalled. "No!"

"You think a woman couldn't do it? Well, don't forget that this one is tall and strong."

Bat gestured the idea away. He, himself, had spoken of Miss Knowles and her doings suspiciously. But now that these suspicions were voiced by another, and raised to a pitch of unthought horror, he almost sickened at them.

"Why," said he, the recollection of many little glances and accents rushing to his mind, "she might even be in love with him."

"He is with her," corrected the woman. "And that, you know, is different."

She once more took up the blue stocking and began to move the needles in and out among the loops. Lena was stolidly engaged in a like manner, never having lifted her head since she began, not even when she herself had spoken.

"Neither of them has any great width between the hair line and the eyebrows," said Bat mentally, as he looked from one to the other. "It's the sort of calm that passes all understanding; and those persons gifted with it usually live blameless lives."

The kitchen clock tick-tocked away in its long, wooden case, as drowsily as need be; the wooden

.

kitchen things which were in view looked heavy and commonplace.

"But, for all they don't seem very ready to grab a thing," said Bat, to himself, "these women have realized something. And that's promising. Things have happened here, and that's the surest sign that things will continue to happen. And this pair may turn out to be of use—if I don't expect too much of them."

The great fireplace faced the open door of the kitchen; they all sat facing the fire, and so with their backs to the door. Bat, with a tight, strained feeling in his brain, clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair.

"To you, who are a stranger, I say all these things," said Mrs. Kretz, busy with her needles. "And it is for this: You have been told nothing—because they are afraid. You are Mr. Campe's friend, and want to help him. But how can you give help where you do not understand?"

Bat agreed with this.

"But," said he, his eyes upon a great copper vessel which stood shining dully from the chimney piece, "I could have wished you'd had some other sort of information for me. For this puts me up against something that'll be pretty hard to do."

The kitchen doorway was reflected in the sheen of the copper vessel; and, framed in this,

his brooding eyes saw a man. It was a soft, bulky figure, with white, fat hands and a round face with small light-colored eyes. And while he looked, it moved softly past the doorway and was gone.

## CHAPTER XI

### TELLS SOMETHING OF TWO GENTLEMEN WHO WERE ENCOUNTERED UNEXPECTEDLY

MR. BARTHOLOMEW SCANLON stood up with much calmness.

"I'm obliged to you," said he nodding first to Mrs. Kretz and then to her daughter. "And I'll think over what you've said. It might bring me even with something."

"There is my husband," said the elder woman. "He thinks women are foolish. You'll not speak to him?"

"About this? No. I'll mention it to no one. And," pausing in his movement toward the door, "if you hear or see anything else which may be useful to Mr. Campe, don't make me wait for it."

"I will speak to you at once," promised Mrs. Kretz, intent upon the blue stocking.

In the hall, outside the kitchen door, Bat Scanlon's manner changed. Bulky as he was and with forty years resting upon him, he was still a well conditioned athlete. Slower than he was at twenty, he was supple enough when he set him-



self to it ; and now he moved down the hall swiftly and with the lightness of a boy.

No one was in sight ; the first door he came to stood open ; it was a sort of storage room for the servants, and no one was there. The next door led to the vaults under the castle ; this was closed. But a turn of the knob showed that it was not locked.

"The soft one oozed in by this route," thought Bat as he closed the door. "And some thoughtful friend prepared the way for him, for witness the fact that there are bolts on the door as well as a lock."

Silently he rebolted the door ; with some slivers of wood from the storage room, pointed with his pocket-knife, he so jammed the bolts that it would be no easy task to shoot them back.

"In this way," murmured Bat, putting away the knife, "I place some small impediment in the path of the soft party should he desire to back out of the premises in a hurry."

Quietly the big man went through the lower floor ; each room was visited and examined narrowly. But he found no one ; there were no traces of any one. At the foot of the stairs he paused ; from above came the voice of Campe, and in it there was lightness and ease.

"The billiard ball is also merrily clicking," said Mr. Scanlon. "Evidently he is still engaged

with the golden-haired Helen, and she is making him forget his troubles." He began quietly to ascend the stairs. "But it might behoove him to keep an eye open ; for who knows when her ambition might break out afresh, and she might take another swing at him with the sword."

As his head appeared above the landing, he came in sight of the billiard room door. This was open and a stream of light flowed out into the hall. Standing flat against the wall, his back to the staircase, and peering around the door-frame into the billiard room was the soft-looking man.

Gently Mr. Scanlon advanced ; quietly he touched the man upon the shoulder ; then, as the head turned, skilfully he chipped him upon the jaw. The body buckled, and crumpled into a soft mass in Scanlon's arms. Lowering it to the floor the big man stepped into the doorway. In the billiard room were Campe and Miss Hohenlo.

"Hello," said the former with a startled look, but a manner expressive of relief. "*I thought* I heard somebody shuffling around out there."

"I'd like to speak to you a moment," said the big man, "if," with a glance at the spinster, "Miss Hohenlo will pardon us."

Miss Hohenlo shook her faded hair and gestured prettily with her beautiful hands.

"Frederic has so many little secrets of late, and so many matters he seems anxious to keep from

me, that one, more or less, will make no difference. I'll rehearse my next play while you are gone."

Campe came out into the hall. Scanlon stood between him and the body until he closed the door.

"Now, sit tight," admonished the big man, "and give me a lift."

With a face as gray as ashes, Campe looked at the senseless man.

"Who is it?" he asked. "And how did he get here?"

"As an answer to the first question, I'll say I don't know," said Scanlon. "To the second, he came in by way of the cellar; and the door leading therefrom was unfastened by some one in the house."

"Again!" Campe looked as though death itself had clutched him. "Again!"

"You've never thought it wise to put me up in these affairs of yours," said Scanlon, "so I'll now have nothing to say in them. However, that'll not stop me from doing any little thing that I think needs doing."

Campe put a trembling hand upon the big man's arm.

"Bat," said he, quietly enough, "no man was ever more bedeviled than I am, and I've not been exactly frank with you ——"

But Scanlon stopped him.

"Some time we'll both be in a humor for a talk," said he, "and we'll save the matter till then. Just now there is another bit of business to work through. Get hold of it by the legs."

Together they took up the heavy body and carried it down the hall to Scanlon's room, where they laid it upon the floor.

"He looks," observed Bat, "as if he'd got his last jolt; but he'll live to get many more, so don't worry. What I want you to do, as a kind of addition to your burden bearing, is to sit here and watch him. Got your gun on?"

"Yes," said young Campe.

"If he comes to, advise him to keep still; if he refuses, poke the barrel in his face. If he insists, hammer him over the head until he grows peaceful."

"But," said Campe, "what are *you* going to do?"

"Look around a little," replied Bat, who had moved toward the door. "I'll not be gone long. Don't say a word now, and watch your man."

Bat softly opened the door and stepped out into the hall. There was nothing definite in his mind; but, vaguely, he felt that there were more experiences to come.

"If one man came out of the vaults, why not more?" he asked himself. "If some one opened

the door leading to those same vaults, how do I know that he is not now opening another, leading somewhere else?"

Quietly he slipped down the hall; the lights were only half up, and the recesses were dim; but there was sufficient illumination for him to see that no one was lurking in its length. Further on the corridor took a sharp turn, and it was in this angle that young Campe's rooms were located.

"Better luck there, maybe," breathed Bat, as he stole along.

But, when he turned the corner, he found that particular portion of the hall in darkness. Instantly he realized that if any one were in hiding there, he offered a fair mark; stepping quickly back around the angle he turned out the nearest lights, so that he was as much in the dark as the possible prowler. Again he moved forward; but he had not gone more than half a dozen steps when he heard a slight sound ahead. He paused and bent forward to listen. The sound continued, creaking, rasping, complaining.

"A door," thought Bat. "A door with unoiled hinges—it's being opened."

His hand went to his hip, and once more the thick automatic was out and ready. The sound stopped; there was a silence for a time; then began a rustling which was unmistakable—the rustle of a woman's skirt.

"The golden Helen!" was Scanlon's next thought. "And promptly on the job!"

The rustling stopped; then a whisper came.

"Paul!"

There was no reply and again came the whisper.

"Paul!"

Once more came the creaking of hinges; another door had opened.

"What is it?" came the answer.

"Hush! Not so loud!" The whisper seemed filled with fear.

Then Bat heard the woman move further forward; she spoke again, but this time so low that he could not catch the words.

"The deuce," said the man, startled. "How do you know?"

"I feel sure of it," was the whispered reply

"Don't lose your nerve," said the man, swiftly. "This is the first good chance we've had, and we must make the best of it."

"Be careful," pleaded the woman.

"I'll be sure to," said the man. "And now keep a lookout. If you hear or see anything, give me the signal."

The hinges of the invisible door creaked as it closed; then the rustling of the skirts began once more. As it approached Bat flattened himself against the wall. Slowly the woman drew nearer;

then she was beside him, her skirts brushing him ; but that she was unaware of his presence was proved by her continuing in silence and without a pause. But after a few moments Bat heard a slight sound as though she had caught her breath suddenly, and she came to a halt.

"She's got to the turn in the hall," said the big man, mentally, "and she's found the two lights off duty."

But the fact did not detain the woman, for once more the rustling began and finally the listener heard it die away.

"And now I may as well push my scouting venture," was Scanlon's soundless resolution. "The man inside there may be engaged in a matter that would interest me a great deal."

But he had barely got under way when he halted.

"The skirts !" said he. "And coming back !"

Sure enough they were. *Frou-frou, frou-frou*, they came, more sharply than before, for the wearer was evidently moving at a brisker pace.

"Something new !" said Scanlon. "Maybe she's dropped to my doings, and she's going to put the party in the room on to it."

He felt that he could not chance the passage of the hall once more ; his groping hand had touched the wood of a door ; now he found the knob, opened the door silently as possible, slipped

inside and partially closed it. It was fortunate that he did so ; for immediately afterward came a short, snapping sound, and a flare of light filled the hall. Scanlon stooped cautiously to the keyhole, and peered through it ; there, holding a lighted match above her golden head, stood Miss Knowles.

"Came back looking for little me," was Mr. Scanlon's conclusion. "Well, look away, Helen of the crown of gold ; for behind the door I'm going to stick."

The match burned out ; there followed the sound of some one moving along the hall, and when silence had fallen once more, Scanlon began to stir. But as he came from behind the door he caught a trickle of light in the room. He stood staring at it for a moment ; and then it dawned upon him what it was.

"Still another door," murmured he.

Gently he approached the seeping light ; it came, as he judged, from under a door, and through its keyhole. He listened ; from the adjoining room he caught the sound of rustling paper, and now and then the closing of a drawer.

"Isn't he the thorough little ransacker, though?" continued Mr. Scanlon, immediately interpreting these sounds. "Well, there's no use in putting him to needless trouble ; I'd better go in and have a few words with him—if I can open the door."



Fortunately he found that he could ; the door swung in, and a man, who stood under a light examining some papers at a table, lifted his head. He put a handkerchief to his lips and coughed ; then he nodded.

"How do you do?" said he.

Mr. Scanlon was equally polite.

"I felt that I'd see you again," stated he. "But I had no idea it would be to-night."

The drawn-looking man turned over a few of the papers ; then gathered up the lot and threw them into a drawer.

"Unexpected little things have a way of happening," said he. "And it's as well that they do ; for they are really of that elemental spice which makes life worth while." He dumped the contents of another drawer upon the table, and nodded toward a chair. "Won't you sit down?" he asked.

"I don't mind if I do," said Mr. Scanlon, sociably.

And so he sat down in the chair. And while the drawn man busied himself with the fresh batch of papers, Bat took out the tobacco pouch and the little packet of papers and rolled himself a cigarette. This he lighted, and puffed away comfortably.

"You seem to be hard at it," commented he, after a pause, during which he watched the labors of the other.

The drawn man admitted that this was so by a gesture.

"It's a more or less difficult proposition," said he. "This room is a regular dumping-place for documents. They seem to have been snatched up and brought here in barrels. Not the slightest care has been taken to keep them properly classed."

"Tut, tut!" observed Mr. Scanlon. "That's what I call just common carelessness. They might have known that you'd call."

The drawn man coughed.

"As to that," said he, "I'm not so sure. We've made an effort to avoid any extreme of publicity, you see."

"Sure, sure!" spoke Bat, understandingly. "Advertising's a fine thing, but not in all lines of endeavor."

The other raked over the papers impatiently.

"Here," said he, "we have an old will, a contract for hauling stone, a marriage certificate, a receipt from the Mexican government for the loan of ten millions of dollars, an estimate for steel rails, and a laundry bill."

"That's mixing them some," said Bat, haloed by the cigarette smoke. "But go at it; better luck next time."

Returning the papers to the drawer, the drawn man next opened a heavy chest. He threw an

armful of documents upon the table, and plunged into them with covetous hands.

"I would say that's a promising lot, from its general appearance," commented Scanlon. "Of course," casually, "I haven't the least idea what you're looking for, but here there seems to be a holding to one thing, a kind of a tight, official, important look, as it were."

The covetous hands became eager ; Bat noticed this; he threw down his cigarette; his muscles tightened ; the automatic thrilled in his grip.

"So you are short of ideas about what we want," spoke the other, still searching. "Has it never occurred to you to ask?"

"Once or twice," replied Scanlon. "But I never got quite up to it. For instance, I met a friend of yours down-stairs a while ago"—here the drawn man coughed, his eyes lifting for an instant—"and I thought of putting the question to him."

"Why didn't you?" asked the drawn man, deep in the papers again.

"He hadn't come to, up to the time I left," replied Bat. "I suppose I must have hit him harder than I meant to do."

"Oh, well," said the drawn man, tolerantly, "things of that sort *will* happen. They are hardly to be avoided, in fact."

He yawned and stretched his arms wide; the

light over his head as he struck it sharply smashed and went out. There came the rattle of the automatic, and the splintering of window glass ; the dogs, always at large in the courtyard at night, barked furiously. Bat heard the voice of Kretz from the wall ; the rifle sounded sharply, and then silence, broken only by the sound of running feet beyond the wall.

## CHAPTER XII

### SPEAKS OF THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GATES OF SCHWARTZBERG WERE OPENED

THROUGH the fragments of the window sash and the shreds of the blind, Bat Scanlon looked out upon the moonlit night. Directly under the window was a roof, as near as he could judge that of the stable. Between this and the top of the wall there was a space of some twelve feet.

“And the fellow with the cough took it like a broad jumper,” commented Bat. “Well, well, we live and learn.”

Then a light illuminated the room behind him ; he turned and met the wondering face of Miss Knowles.

“What has happened?” she asked, rather breathlessly.

Bat surveyed her with much composure. He had been right in his estimate of her beauty ; that wasn't to be denied. He was sure he'd never seen a more splendid example of her type. Her figure was like that of the queen in a story-book. Her complexion was like snow and rose petals ; her eyes were as deep and as blue as the sea.

"If I hadn't regular good reasons for believing what I do, one look at her would scatter the whole fleet of suspicion," was Bat's thought as he gazed. "She does it well. I never saw a better attempt to put a thing across. Ten minutes ago she was talking to the crook ; now here she is, asking as innocently as you please : 'What has happened?'"

"I heard a noise as I sat in my room," said Miss Knowles. "I heard shots," her face a trifle paler. "Has any one been hurt?"

"No such luck," replied Mr. Scanlon. He replaced the automatic in his pocket and his broad back against the wall. "Fellow was just here making free with some papers. I happened in on him, and he headed for the window."

The girl approached the table and looked at the papers curiously ; her hands wandered among them and her eyes scanned one after another.

"Did he take any of them?" she asked.

A shock ran through the large frame of Mr. Scanlon ; for it occurred to him that he did not know. He was busy wrestling with this somewhat unpleasant thought when hasty feet were heard tramping along the hall ; and in another moment Campe and the sergeant-major were in the room.

"Who was it?" asked Campe. "Did you see him, Scanlon?"

"I did," replied Bat. "And I let fly at him."

Then in as few words as possible he related his experiences since leaving Campe on guard over the unconscious prowler, being careful, however, to omit that part of it which dealt with the whispering and the rustling of skirts in the hallway.

"Whatever his game is," concluded the big man, "he was a pal of the fellow you've got down the hall." Here he caught the expression that came into Campe's face; at the same instant he noted that Miss Knowles had left the room. How long she had been gone he did not know; but it must have been while he was deep in his narrative. "The man's still there, ain't he?" he asked Campe.

"When I heard the shots I left the room," said the young man. "Then Kretz ran up-stairs, and we came hunting you."

Without a word Bat rushed along the hall; the door of his room was open, and the soft man was gone. Then down the stairs went Bat, three at a leap. The plug still held in the bolt of the cellar door, so he was sure that the prowler had not gone that way. There was only one other way of escape. The gate! And when he reached the courtyard the gate stood wide; the watch dogs were running in and out, whining uncertainly and apparently still much excited.

Both Campe and the German soldier had pressed hard after Scanlon; and the young mas-

ter of Schwartzberg was aware of the truth as soon as the big man.

"He's gone," said he, in a husky kind of way. "Gone!"

"Well, if he'll only stay gone, it'll be all right," spoke Mr. Scanlon. "And while we're thinking over the possibilities of that," to Kretz, "suppose you shut the gate."

The sergeant-major did as requested; at the order of young Campe, he mounted guard upon the wall once more, and then both Campe and Scanlon made a complete search of the castle; every nook and crevice was examined, but evidently if there had been others they had also taken occasion to depart with the opening of the portal.

"The gentlemen who are in the habit of visiting you," remarked Mr. Scanlon to the master of Schwartzberg, "are very self-possessed, and have more than the usual share of acuteness. I never saw any one collection of persons with more up their sleeves than this lot appears to have."

"They are cunning enough," said the other; and there was a hopeless note in his voice. "Sufficiently so to get the better of me, at all events."

"In a fight like this," advised Mr. Scanlon, "never admit, even to yourself, that the opposi-



tion has anything on you. It has a bad effect. Even the best of us has no real liking for a bruising battle, if we get the bruising ; and we're only looking for an excuse to side step. And thoughts like those provide the excuse."

At the cellar door Campe stopped.

"We'll not venture into the vaults," said he, in a tired way. His face had the sagged look which hopelessness brings, and his eyes were without lustre. "It may not be safe."

"It's clear enough to me," said Scanlon, bluntly, "that some one has pretty plain sailing into these cellars of yours. They seem to come piling in whenever the spirit moves them. I'd do something in the matter if I were you, even if it was only to post a warning to trespassers."

"There must be a way of getting in," admitted Campe, dully. "I made up my mind to that some time ago. But," and his voice broke with a sharpness that startled Scanlon, "a man whose life is in danger every moment of it can't take too many chances."

Bat put his hands on the young man's shoulders and looked steadily into his face.

"Hold up!" said he. "Hold up! You're up against something raw and hard. But don't let them stop you. No matter what the thing is—sit tight. You're going to win out."

"Win!" Campe threw up his hands and

laughed mirthlessly. "You don't know the facts or you wouldn't say that."

"Maybe I'm not on to *all* the facts," said Bat, stuffing his hands into his pockets, "but I'm on to the very worst of the lot. And even in spite of that, I say you'll win."

"The worst!" said Campe, and his eyes searched Bat's face. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just that—the worst! Listen. One time when I was a youngster I was out with old Dick Bunder, packing stuff out to Gabriel City. Now Gabriel was out on the desert and was made up of a half dozen 'dobe houses and a few tents around a water-hole. The first night I spent in the place it was attacked by Apaches, and the thing went on for days. Bitter, cruel work it was in the heat, with no sleep, and death barking always from across the sands. The Apaches were bad, but," and Bat shook his head, "there was something worse."

"Yes?" said young Campe.

"Much worse," affirmed Bat. "And it was inside. Somebody was calling off our hands to the enemy."

Campe's face grew rigid; his mouth twitched and one shaking hand went to it as though to hide his weakness.

"Some one inside," said he. "Inside! Yes, that's a fearful thing. Outside's bad enough."

But the other." He stood, his fingers pressing against his lips for a moment; then he asked, suddenly, "Did you find the person out?"

"I did," answered the big man. "And I have found out the one in Schwartzberg."

Campe stretched out the shaking hand and laid it against Scanlon's chest.

"Don't say anything more," said he. "Not her name, for God's sake! I couldn't stand that!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEALS WITH SOME HAPPENINGS OF THE NEXT DAY

THE remainder of the night passed without incident, and next morning Scanlon, accompanied by Kretz, who carried the light, made a complete tour of the regions beneath the castle. No one was hidden there; there were only the massive walls and arches, the damp and the echo.

"Locks and bolts seem to offer no hindrance to housebreakers," said Bat, speaking to Campe who met them when they came up. "So, with your permission, we'll have a few additional precautions."

Procuring a hammer and some heavy nails, the door to the vaults was made fast.

"Now," Bat proceeded, "we are in a position to offer some defense against another invasion. But," and he glanced from Campe to the silent German, and back again, "how the dickens they got into the cellar puzzles me. I looked all around; but not a way could I see."

"If we can prevent any further entrances into the house itself, for the present, we'll be satisfied," said Campe.

Scanlon did not approve of this. It indicated a willingness to share something with the enemy.

"Which is always wrong," he told himself, later, as he trudged along the road on his way to Marlowe Furnace. "If it was my affair, I'd shake it up till I had those crooks headed for the next county."

Campe had abruptly closed the conversation of the night before with the request that no names be mentioned, and so Scanlon had been left in a state of doubt.

"He knows, or suspects about the girl," thought the big man, "but what about these other people? Has he got them placed? I'd 'a' told him all I'd seen and heard last night, but as he wanted silence, silence it is. Anyway," as an afterthought, "it might have been a wrong move to say anything more than I did. Maybe Ashton-Kirk doesn't want him told."

There were no letters for him at the village post-office, and he was much disappointed. So much had happened to him in the last twenty-four hours that he had the feeling that Ashton-Kirk must also have had some exciting experiences which he would report at once.

"But he hasn't had time to say anything," reasoned the big man. "Maybe I'll get something in the mail to-night."

He stood upon the post-office steps and lighted a cigar ; while he was puffing thoughtfully at this, he felt his arm jostled gently. Turning he saw an old man with a basket on his arm, and a hand tangled in a chin beard.

"How d'ye do?" asked the old man.

"Pretty fair," said Bat.

"Stopping up at Schwartzberg, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Thought so. My name's Henry; got a brother over at the station."

"Oh, yes," said Bat. "I detect the family resemblance. How is he?"

"Doing tolerable." There was a slight pause, then the old man disentangled the hand and jostled Scanlon's arm once more. "Remember a man that asked for you one night at the station—fat kind of a fellow?"

"Yes," said Bat.

"Saw him last night."

"That so?" Bat was unmoved, smoking calmly.

"Helped to take him to Doc Sharpless's. Found him in the road, not far from Schwartzberg. Was coming along in a wagon with my brother when I seen him. Only for the moon we'd run over him."

"What was wrong?" asked Scanlon, carelessly.

"Don't know. He told Doc Sharpless he fell somehow. Doc says he'd got a bad bump."

The old fellow looked at Bat as though he expected him to say something. But the big man examined the wrapper of his cigar in silence.

"I'd never knowed who the fellow was," said the man with the basket, "only my brother was along. He told me."

Still Bat was silent, and the greater grew the old chap's disappointment.

"We reckoned you'd like to hear about him," resumed he. "Of course we thought he must be a friend of yours."

"Entire stranger," replied Bat, briefly.

"Funny, ain't it, how he should come asking after you like that, and you not know him? And then to find him unconscious in the road out by the castle, too. We thought that was very queer."

It occurred to Scanlon that the tone of the old man's remarks was not desirable. So he attempted to shift it about.

"When a person feels that he must fall," remarked Bat, "he should be very careful in the selection of a place to fall in. Now the middle of a roadway as a site shows carelessness, don't you think?"

But the ancient refused to be side-tracked. He clung to his theme like a terrier.

"Yes, we thought it was kind of queer," he reaffirmed. "But then," with a shake of his head, "I don't know as we should, after all. For there's such a lot of queer things going on around Schwartzberg that we shouldn't be surprised at one more. What between some kind of thunder, and gun shots and people running and racing about in the night, that house has given this village something to think about."

Bat grinned, and smoked away.

"So they think the castle's a place of interest, do they?" he asked.

"It's a place they're afraid of," said the old man. Since he had failed to get Scanlon to talk, he seemed determined to do the next best thing—talk himself. "Tom Gould's constable here, and he's thinking of looking into things."

"Oh, well," said Bat, "we can't blame Tom for showing a little enterprise."

"There ain't never been any such goings on at Marlowe Furnace before," stated the man with the basket. "And I don't think folks'll put up with it much longer. Shots and strange noises and finding people hurt in the middle of the road'll never do. It ought to be seen into."

"Why don't you speak to Campe?" suggested Bat.

"How could I—or anybody else, if it comes to that?" demanded the ancient. "How often is he



seen? And when he does come out, why does he look as if he was running away when he gets sight of anybody? What's wrong with him? What's he afraid of? What's he done—him with his dogs, and his man on the wall, and his search-light, frightening the women and kids."

"I think," said Bat, "you're imagining a good deal of this. Anyway, it's Campe's own place, and I suppose he can do as he likes on it."

He nodded to the old man with a smile, but as he walked away from the post-office he was thoughtful enough.

"Getting on the nerves of the population, eh?" said he. "Well, I don't wonder. A fellow can't go slam-banging around like that and not attract attention."

He noticed, as he went along, that more than one person regarded him curiously; little knots of people gathered behind him, their heads together and no doubt deep in the discussion of the odd doings about Schwartzberg. He had left Marlowe Furnace some distance behind when an idea occurred to him.

"I'll just top a few of these hills to the left," said he, "and stop off at the inn. It wouldn't surprise me if I saw or heard some little thing of interest. These fellows with the lame lungs and the lame legs seem to have more to them than a first glance shows."

So Mr. Scanlon confidently took the path across the hills. As a rule a criminal caught in the act of housebreaking would not be expected to linger in the neighborhood of his exploit ; but that the man with the cough had departed was not at all in the calculations of Bat.

"According to the dope of both Kirk and Mrs. Kretz, Campe is afraid of the police," was the way the big man reasoned it out. "Knowing the nature of the thing which makes Campe afraid, the housebreaker knows that the police won't be called in. So, then, he'll stick around, waiting for another chance."

In the road which led to the inn Bat heard the sound of wheels ; it was the rolling chair containing the man with the flattened skull. The black, glittering eyes of the invalid fixed themselves upon Bat as he came up with the chair. The big man noted this and nodded.

"Nice day," said he.

"Splendid," replied the invalid, in his peculiarly strong voice. "In fact there has been a succession of fine days. This section seems specially favored."

Bat nodded his head many times.

"I've been thinking something like that myself," he said. "There seem to be things here which a fellow wouldn't be likely to run into anywhere else."

"I've noticed you a number of times with your dogs and gun," said the sick man. "The game is none too plentiful hereabouts, I should say."

"It depends a good bit on what you're after," stated Mr. Scanlon.

"Yes, I suppose that is true."

The tone of the man in the chair was quieter than usual; his manner, too, seemed mild. But the expression of his full-lipped mouth was one of infinite savagery; his eyes shone like those of a caged beast.

"Doctor sent you out here, I suppose," said Scanlon, as they went on toward the inn.

The invalid gestured with one wasted hand.

"We who have no health," said he, "are forever under a doctor's directions. We can never follow our own desires."

Bat regarded the speaker attentively.

"Any one," was his thought, "who could make you do what you didn't want to do would be a good one."

But aloud he said:

"Don't it beat the dickens! The doc who has you in charge, I've noticed, seems to have some confidence in fresh air. I suppose that's why you keep so much to the roads."

"Yes," replied the invalid.

"Outdoors," said Scanlon, "is a fine thing. I guess that's why there is so much of it. It's full

of benefits, night or day. Moonlight nights,' sagely, "are especially good. Then you not only get the air, but you get a view of things, which helps the mind. Last night was as bright as day, and Schwartzberg looks well with the moon on it."

The beast in the man glared out more than ever from the black eyes, and the teeth gleamed between the full lips. But he said, quietly :

"Ah, yes ; I can believe that Schwartzberg is an interesting place. I have given it some attention since I have been here."

Bat nodded.

"A number of people have," said he. "We have visitors happening in every now and then."

"Some time *I* shall go," said the invalid. "I have been promising myself that for a long while."

"Sure," said the big man, easily ; "of course. But the others only stayed a little while. When you come, we'll keep you longer."

"Thank you," said the sick man. "You are very kind."

Here his chair turned into the gravel path leading to the inn door, and Scanlon followed it. The cramped-looking man with the crutch and the walking stick was stamping up and down.

"The blood," declared the cramped-looking man, "is the most important thing in the body. It is meant to carry vigor to all our outlying parts

but, sir, it carries other things at times—other things not so desirable.”

A tall man with a saffron complexion and a pair of thick blue spectacles sat in a cane chair; his clothes hung about him as if he had shrunk a half-hundredweight in a short time; his long hands, as yellow as his face, were clasped before him.

“I will not try to belittle the function of the blood,” said he in a husky voice. “It would be foolish in me to do so. But you exaggerate it, sir. And why? Your joints are solidifying through deposits of lime; this is carried to the joints by the blood, and therefore you give undue importance to that fluid.”

“Undue importance!” The cramped man paused in his stumping and seemed astounded. “Undue! But, my good sir, how can that be? It is life itself.”

The yellow-faced man jeered at this.

“Fiddlesticks!” said he. “Fiddlesticks, Mr. Hirst. Since the time Harvey discovered its circulation, sentimentalists have overpraised this corpuscle-carrying agent. They have given it credit which it in no way deserves. In much the same way poets and novelists have misrepresented the heart. To them, this is the seat of affection—of every noble impulse—where, as a matter of fact, it is nothing more than a pump.”

The cramped-looking man cast a look of complaint at every one on the porch ; then he was about to put it into words, but the yellow man stopped him.

"You spoke of the blood as 'carrying' vigor," said the latter. "'Carrying,' mind you. And that's all it does—carry. It remains for other and more important things to make and introduce both that vigor of which you speak and that lack of vigor. The liver, now ; take that ! There's a piece of machinery for you. There's an organ which means something."

The cramped man seemed amused. He cackled and hammered with his cane upon the floor.

"The liver," said he ; "why, I've known men to go on forty years who had no livers at all. Because yours has refused to secrete and has painted you up with jaundice, you put it out front, and belittle more important things. With good blood, sir, a man need have no liver."

"Without a liver," maintained the saffron-hued man, "he could not have good blood."

Mr. Scanlon nodded to the landlord.

"It's a fine, uplifting conversation," said he, in a low tone. "Do you have to listen to them often ?"

The innkeeper smiled.

"About two-thirds of the talk here is symptoms," answered he.

"I once stopped at a hotel in Colorado," said Bat, "where they were loaded up with a bunch something like this one of yours. They'd sit around and draw diagrams of each other, and stick pins in the places where their ailments were located. And I never saw one of them back up when it came to the possession of the most deadly complaint. They were as keen for the championship as a bunch of amateur trap-shooters."

"These are about like that," said the landlord.

"It's funny the way the thing works," commented Bat. "A man can go along all his life with no one paying the slightest attention to him; then he accumulates a rare disease, and at once becomes an object of interest. Can you blame him if he cherishes his aches and makes much of his pains? They've lifted him out of the rut for the first time in his life, and given him something to brag about."

The wheels of the rolling chair sounded upon the porch floor, and the squat servant pushed it on into the hotel. Scanlon glanced about.

"I don't see the man with the cough," said he to the landlord.

"Mr. Shaw, I suppose you mean."

"Sort of a worn-out looking fellow," said Bat, carelessly.

"Mr. Shaw met with a small but rather painful

accident," said the landlord. "It happened last night; he scratched and bruised himself by falling into one of my hot-bed sashes which some one left carelessly in the way."

"I see," said Bat. "Sash hurt much?"

"About all the lights of glass in it are broken," said the innkeeper. "But I can't understand who could have been handling it, and why."

Mr. Scanlon felt that he could enlighten the hotel man upon both these points, but he judged it best to keep the matter to himself. Here the man with the crutch stumped away into the hotel, and in a few moments the landlord followed. The saffron-hued man turned his dark glasses upon Scanlon.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but I had not noticed you before. Are you a guest of the house?"

"No," replied Bat. "Not yet."

"I was recommended here," said the man. "Just came yesterday. I find that most of the guests are here for a purpose."

"So *I've* noticed," replied Scanlon, agreeably.

The jaundiced man shook his head.

"Ah, the doctors," said he. "If I could control my liver without their attention, I'd be satisfied never to lay eyes upon another one of them." He studied Bat for a space, and then said in an



awed tone, "The liver, sir, is a most tremendous thing."

"So I've heard," said Scanlon, cheerfully. "I suppose I've got one myself, but it's never introduced itself to me, and so I haven't given it much attention."

The saffron-hued man seemed appalled at this last.

"Sir," said he, "I am a stranger, and I know it is a very great liberty to take, but I cannot help a word to you, now that I see it is needed."

"Sure," said Bat; "go ahead!"

"Some one—and a very wise person it must have been—has said: 'In time of peace, prepare for war.' That, sir, should be the duty of every man; he should not procrastinate; he should, so to speak, take his liver by the forelock, and tame it—tame it, sir, completely."

"But," protested Mr. Scanlon, "a liver that's never, in its career as such, said anything to its owner, seems to me to be tame enough."

The jaundiced one grew more agitated than ever.

"Don't be deceived," begged he. "Don't be imposed upon. They are things given to the most deplorable treachery. One can place no faith in them whatever; they are worthy of not the lightest confidence. They have been known," and here his voice shook a little, "to stop short in

their functions at an instant's notice—and this after years of apparent devotion."

"Well," said Scanlon, "that does look like a shabby deal, that's a fact. But what's a fellow unaccustomed to such things to do? How is he to know when to jump in with his corrective measures?"

"Any time will do before the thing asserts its independence of you. If it is mild, beware of it; for like as not it will eventually become like an old man of the sea and rule you completely. Scourge it; drench it with compelling draughts; submerge it completely; bombard it with bitter pills."

"I suppose," said Bat, "you speak as a man who neglected all these measures."

"Utterly, sir, utterly!" The saffron-hued man shook his head sadly. "I had no voice to speak a warning word; I was unlearned in the wiles of the thing. Even after it had secured the whip hand of me, I could have defeated it if I had been told how by a person of experience in such struggles. With a few dozen bottles of 'Seaweed Tonic' I could have stopped its assault; and with a handful of 'Grady's Gray Granules' I could have put it to flight."

"Maybe," said Mr. Scanlon, "I'll lay in a stock of those some time."

"They are the only permanent hope of man,"

declared the yellow gentleman. "Behind a stockade made of the 'Tonic' and the 'Granules' he can defy the encroachments of even the most evilly disposed of livers."

Bat went inside, smoked a second cigar, and chatted with the landlord. None of the guests was to be seen, and so the big man gradually drifted into a conversation concerning them. But the landlord was apparently without any information.

"They come and they go," said he, "and, as I said, I'm glad to have them, to get over the autumn and the winter months. But I don't know anything about them except that they are sick."

After a time Scanlon, seeing that little was to be gained by lingering about the inn, departed. He noted that the jaundiced man was not upon the porch as he crossed it; but beyond that he never gave him a thought.

However, when he saw him, small and far away on a hilltop, stooping, studying and moving here and there, the big man manifested some interest.

"Hello!" said he; "what's this?"

Cautiously he made his way toward the spot, moving along fences and keeping trees between himself and the other where it was possible. Finally he was able to make out the man and his doings with little difficulty.

The saffron-colored one had a glass in his hand

and was examining the bole of an oak tree which grew on the crest of the hill.

"Same tree I stood under last night when I watched the fellow in the rolling chair," murmured Bat. "Wonder what he finds wrong with it?"

From the tree the yellow man fell to carefully noting the dried stems of some stunted bushes; then he studied something here and there upon the ground, sometimes using the glass, but more often not.

"If I didn't have a first class reason for suspecting invalids," said Mr. Scanlon, "I'd say this fellow was a botanist—maybe hunting a plant which, when cooked, would have some sort of a discouraging effect on the liver."

He watched the man for some time; carefully the saffron-hued one went from place to place, from tree to tree, from one clump of dried brush to another. Gradually he moved down one hill and up the side of another. From the top of this a good view was to be had of Schwartzberg through the trees, and stationing himself behind one of these, the stranger looked long and searchingly toward the castle.

Kretz was not to be seen upon the walls; but at one of the windows Bat made out a woman's figure. Apparently the saffron-hued man also saw her; but apparently he desired a better view. So

taking a field-glass from a case which hung at his side, he trained it upon the window.

He spent some little time in watching the woman; then putting the glass away he moved along a road that ran between the hills at a sharp angle from Schwartzberg. Much interested, Bat followed. Again the stranger turned sharply, this time toward the river. And now Scanlon understood his movements.

"He's been making for the waterside all along," reasoned the big man. "And he came this way so as not to be seen from the castle."

Evidently this was correct. The stranger, when he gained the river, began walking along its margin in the direction of Schwartzberg, concealed by a sharp rise in the ground. But his searching glances seemed not to gain him the satisfaction he sought; and so, finally, though he did not seem at all eager to do so, he approached that portion of the riverside in full view of the castle.

The river was fairly broad at this point and its placid waters flowed by with scarcely a ripple; a great mass of soft reddish rocks ran from the walls of the castle down to the water's edge.

"He seems somewhat backward about putting himself on display," said Scanlon, as he watched the doings of the jaundiced man with keen attention. "But, then, he may have the most urgent reasons for it, so I'll not pick on him for that."

From across the river came the sounds of laughing; some boys were fishing from a boat, and were shouting to each other over some comic misadventure. The saffron-hued man lifted his head and looked out across the slowly flowing water; but the pause was for an instant only; for he proceeded with the matter in hand.

A dozen yards further on he stooped, and seemed to grow intent and eager. Out came the lens which Bat had seen him use on the top of the tall hill, and down on his knees he went to examine something on the ground.

"And right there," said Bat, "is the place where the soft-looking party broke through the edge of the bank and flopped into the water." He stood watching for a space, and then, unable to restrain his curiosity, he pulled his hat firmly down upon his head and said: "I think I'll have a closer view of those proceedings. They may contain something I ought to know."

With a light step he moved along the river bank until he was within a half dozen paces of the stooping yellow man. Then he paused, and said:

"Hello! What's the idea? Lost something?"

The yellow man replied promptly, without turning or lifting his head, and in a voice from which every vestige of huskiness was gone.

"Just working out a little idea, that's all."

At the voice Mr. Scanlon gasped. Then the man's head lifted without the blue glasses. Even the yellow stain was no disguise.

"Kirk!" said the big man. "Kirk, by George!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN WHICH ASHTON-KIRK HEARS MATTERS OF INTEREST

THE special detective smiled and nodded.

"Just a moment," said he ; " there are a few little indications which I want to make sure of, then I'll talk to you." Swiftly he worked with the glass and a small ivory rule ; then pocketing these he resumed the blue glasses and arose to his feet. "I gather from your words and your expression of face that you're a trifle surprised !"

"It's a clean knock-out," announced Bat. He looked closely at the other and then shook his head. "I never understood before how much a man's eyes had to do with his appearance," said he.

"Hide the eyes," said Ashton-Kirk, "and you are half disguised already. Then a change in the voice and the dress and you are complete, only needing some acting along the line of your assumed character. The rôle of a sick man is one of the easiest to assume, as perhaps any physician could tell you. The blue glasses are natural, then ; also the tinted skin and the huskiness of voice. A suit of clothes three or four sizes too large at once sets you down as having lost a great



deal of weight ; and then some intimate conversation regarding your particular complaint places you above suspicion."

"Intimate conversation is right," said Mr. Scanlon. "You talked about yours with the freedom and knowledge of a man who had bred one for years. But without that I'd not have recognized you ; you settled so right plumb into place among that outfit of crooks that I never thought of you being something else."

"Crooks !" said Ashton-Kirk. "So you have found that out."

"Well, I should say yes. Since I've come here I've found out two things at least ; and they are that a man might be rolled in a chair and still be a fairly competent criminal ; and also that a man might cough and cough, and be a villain still."

"I think you might go further than Alva and Shaw," said Ashton-Kirk, "and still be fairly safe."

"You mean the man with the crutch ?"

The crime specialist nodded.

"Also the landlord," said he.

Bat whistled at this and stared. The other went on :

"On our first visit there I fancied I caught a certain undertone of insincerity ; an indefinite air of prearrangement pervaded the place ; there were moments when I had the feeling that a sort of stage play had been arranged for our benefit.

This, with some other things, made me somewhat curious, and yesterday I made a few queries at a small hotel some miles away. As I expected, the proprietor was perfectly willing to talk. He told me, as you did, that the innkeeper over yonder had only had the place for about six months, and that his present guests came at practically the same time."

"Ah!" said Mr. Scanlon.

"Other guests had gone there from time to time, but things were very unpleasant, and as no attempt was made to make them right, the newcomers had never remained long."

"The unpleasantness was made to order, eh?" observed Bat. "The new guests were not wanted." He looked at the detective for a moment, then he added: "That house is headquarters for the whole movement against Campe."

"I have taken the liberty of learning the size and peculiarities of the footprints made by the various gentlemen holding forth there, and I find they correspond exactly with those of persons whose movements hereabouts show an intense interest in Schwartzberg."

"Well," said Bat, "I see there are various ways of coming at a fact. You began with a mental impression and ended with the impression of a foot; and I started with the expression of a lady's face, and finished with an expression of amazement."

"You've also been having some experiences then," said Ashton-Kirk, interest in his voice. "I rather fancied you would. And as there will be no better time than the present, suppose you tell me just what they were."

They seated themselves upon a flat rock out of eyeshot of Schwartzberg, and Bat began a report of his adventures. He told of his meeting with Miss Knowles on the road and her agitation at the thought of a fresh visit from the crime specialist ; of the soft-looking man who stood in the lane writing in a leather-covered book ; of Miss Knowles and her interest in the direction of the wind ; of his seeing her at the window overlooking that point afterward ; of the man in the chair and his strange actions ; of the meeting with the man with the cough and the peppery little doctor ; of the happening on the river bank ; of his talk with Mrs. Kretz ; of the laying low of the soft man ; of the whispered conversation between the house-breaker and the woman in the darkened hall ; of the escape of the latter ; of the disappearance of Miss Knowles from the room, followed by the liberation of the prisoner.

When Bat had finished—and he did not slight a detail—his friend laughed softly.

"Experiences—yes," said he. "And you have a most excellent memory. When you came to me the other day you complained of everything being

elusive and difficult to make head or tail of. It would seem, from what you have told me now, that this had changed."

"Altogether," said Scanlon. "I don't know a great deal more of the truth, but there's no end to the happenings. As a matter of fact, I seem to be squaring up to something all the time."

"And something of undoubted interest," said Ashton-Kirk. He looked toward the river and added, "That, I suppose, is the place where you heard the man tumble into the water last night."

"Yes," replied Bat; "there where the bank is broken."

"I'll remember that," said the other. "Indeed, it was in the hope of coming upon something of the sort that I came this way."

Bat looked at him in surprise, but before he could speak the other went on:

"The matter of the northwest wind has a rare sound, and the affair of the sword will in the end, I have no doubt, prove of much interest." He was silent for a space as though thinking, and then proceeded: "And so Mrs. Kretz is inclined to suspect the girl of foul work?"

Bat nodded.

"She is," said he. "And, much against my will, I'm inclined to do the same."

"You say you heard her talk to Shaw in the dark hall; and afterward when she had suspected

something wrong because of the lights further along being turned off, she came back to learn who had done it."

"She did," said Bat. "I saw her as plainly as I see you."

"Things fall together very oddly at times," said the crime specialist, more to himself than to Bat. "Very oddly." Then to Scanlon: "Miss Knowles, you say, was interested to know if Shaw had taken any of the papers at which he was looking?"

"Yes," replied Bat.

"I, also, am a trifle curious as to that." The soulless blue glasses were fixed upon the big man steadily. "What did Campe have to say in the matter?"

"Nothing," replied Bat. "At least nothing that I heard."

"It's singular," said Ashton-Kirk, "how a man will hold to silence regarding some things. In the midst of happenings which sap his courage and weaken his will in everything else, this young man keeps his mouth shut as to the cause of it."

"If it's something which began with his father," said Bat, "and you think it might be, as your sending your man to Mexico shows—isn't it possible that Campe doesn't know what it is?"

But the crime specialist shook his head.

"No," said he. "If this were so, he would not hesitate to call in the police."

"That's true," said Bat. "It never occurred to me."

"Your crippled man, in his chair on the hill-top, watching the moon on the towers of Schwartzberg, is a pleasing thought," said Ashton-Kirk. The keen, complete form which he gave every word showed intense interest. "He smiled, you say, and closed his eyes?"

"And a couple of times he laughed," answered Scanlon.

"The hill is northwest of the castle, is it?"

"Almost exactly, as far as I can make out."

"And Miss Knowles stood in a window facing in that direction?"

"Yes."

"A little while before she had expressed, by certain mannerisms, an odd sort of interest in that particular point of the compass?"

"That was plain enough," stated Bat. "Anybody who was there could see it."

"It looks," and again the vacant blue glasses fixed themselves upon Mr. Scanlon, "it looks quite a bit like something prearranged. A signal, perhaps."

But Scanlon shook his head.

"No," said he. "The hill is too far away. And another thing: moonlight, no matter how bright, is uncertain. You can't be dead sure of getting an eye full of anything."

Ashton-Kirk nodded ; the blue glasses looked rounder and more vacant than before. But there was a deep wrinkle at the top of the nose between them which told Scanlon that the detective had marked the incident well.

"It means something," the big man told himself. "And he'll hit on it before he's through. But *what* it means and how he's going to work on it is too much for me."

After a little Ashton-Kirk arose.

"Stay here," said he. "I'll not be more than a few minutes."

But he was gone a good half hour, and in that time Bat could see him prowling up and down along the river bank, the blue glasses off and the magnifying lens in his hands. The rocks in particular seemed to interest him ; and when he returned he carried a bit of one in his hand.

"Soft, and almost crying its age aloud," said he. "I know of no region of such little interest to a geologist."

He stood for a space, the long yellow fingers crumbling the surface of the soft stone ; then he said :

"The recent activity around here seems to prove one thing to me ; and that is that Campe's enemies have made up their minds to end what might very well be called the siege of Schwartzberg."

"Right," said Mr. Scanlon. "They are pushing the job to its finish. And I can tell you why. The girl has tipped them off that you are here, and has handed them your record. They mean to rush the fight from now on, afraid that you're coming back."

"As you are not quite sure as to the people inside the castle," said the detective, "I will recommend that you keep even a keener watch than before. But do so in such a way as not to attract attention. Especially watch for small events ; they are more apt to be of value to us than showier ones ; people as a rule are guarded as to the big things, while the small ones are gone through often with no care."

"When do you hope to hear from Fuller?" asked Scanlon.

"It will take the greater part of a week for him to reach the place of operation, and with the best of luck two days will be taken up in gathering the facts I want."

"A lot of things may happen in that time," remarked the big man. "It might be that before you get his report we'll meet the rush of the invalid corps in such a way that we'll put them down for the count."

Ashton-Kirk made no reply ; the big man waited for a moment or two ; the vacant blue glasses were fixed upon a point some little distance away.



Scanlon turned and looked in the same direction.

"Hello!" said he, in a low tone. "Who's that?"

A man walked along the river bank, his head bent, his eyes upon the ground. But as the two looked the head lifted and he saw them. He started and stiffened suddenly. Then his hand went up in a salute, and he moved toward them.

It was the German sergeant-major, Kretz.

## CHAPTER XV

### TELLS HOW AMAZEMENT FILLED THE MIND OF MR. SCANLON

THERE was something in the manner of Kretz as he approached that drew Bat Scanlon's attention.

"I should say that he was somewhat peevish," said the big man to Ashton-Kirk. "But why I can't say."

Indeed, the face of the German was grimmer than ever; his small gray eyes looked from under their thick, overhanging brows in a way that showed open hostility.

"Hello!" said Scanlon. "Having a little exercise?"

But the man ignored this.

"Who is this?" asked he, and his angry eyes were fixed upon Ashton-Kirk.

"A friend of mine," replied Bat. "He's stopping over at the inn. Only had the pleasure of meeting him this morning, but I will say for him that he has one of the most picturesque livers in captivity."

The German only looked grim.

"This," said he, "is private property."

"My name is Flood," said Ashton-Kirk, huskily. "And I am sorry to trespass."

"When you reach the edge of our domain in going back, be sure to wipe your shoes," admonished Scanlon. "We wouldn't care to have you take any of it away with you."

The man with a yellow face smiled.

"Well, good-day, Mr. Scanlon," said he. "I think I'll make my way back to the inn. You have been very kind."

"Not at all," said Bat, with a wave of the hand. "Glad to do any little thing I can for you at any time."

The fictitious Mr. Flood, saffron-hued, blue-spectacled and stiff-gaited, moved away, taking a path which soon hid him from view behind the rising ground.

Kretz now turned to Scanlon.

"You," said he, "are a friend of Mr. Campe's. Good! I am but a servant. Good! It is not my place to say what you must not do. Is it not so?"

"I think that statement would stand in most instances," replied Bat.

"I have the excuse," said Kretz. "Herr Campe is now like a man who is sick. He can't help himself. You have seen that. And so his people must be his eyes and his ears. They must also,"

and here the square-cut face tightened more than ever, "be his tongue. They must speak when he cannot."

"I see," said Bat. "And so you accordingly seized upon this occasion to lift up your voice in his behalf."

"You are a stranger here," said the German, who did not seem to listen to what Bat said, much less understand it. "You do not know some things which are known to me."

Bat blinked solemnly.

"It seems to me I've heard that, or something like it, before," said he. "But don't take so much credit for your exclusive information. You might not have it as safely cornered as you think."

"The tramps ——" began Kretz, but the big man stopped him impatiently.

"Tramps nothing!" said he. "Don't go on with that kind of thing. I'm not an infant in arms to be fed with pap. If you have no real out-in-the-open talk on this subject, keep quiet about it. I passed the point where the tramps were long ago."

Kretz stood, with frowning brows, looking at the other. Then his right hand went up in a salute.

"Excuse!" said he.

He regarded Bat for still another moment; then he came a step nearer.

"You have known Herr Campe for a long time?"

"Quite a while."

"Before you come he spoke much of you," said the German. "He asked me what I thought of sending for you. I said," candidly, the hand lifting to another salute, "not to do it."

"Why?"

"I was not sure. It was a time when a man could *not* be sure. All strangers were dangerous."

"But I was a stranger to you only. Didn't you give Mr. Campe any credit for judgment, or knowledge of people?"

"Herr Campe," said Kretz, "as I have said, is like a man who is sick. He does not know who his friends are. That, sir, was plain to me when ——" But he stopped shortly at this, his jaws snapping as though to shut in any words which might complete the sentence. Then, after a moment, he said: "You will be careful of the strangers?"

Bat nodded.

"Excuse," said the man, and with another salute he turned and went on his way along the river.

Scanlon returned to the castle and was admitted, much to his surprise, by Miss Knowles.

"You must have gone a great way to-day," she said, with a smile which showed her beautiful teeth.

"Quite a bit of a tramp," acknowledged the big man. "But then it's a bracing morning, and a fellow should put such days to good use."

"Kretz seems to think the same," said she. "He asked leave to go, and I promised to keep the gate. But," and her head shook slowly, "he didn't cross the hills, as you did; he seemed to prefer to take the path along the river."

"That so?" said Bat. And, mentally, he added: "Oh, golden Helen, what makes you always have meanings on the side? This is the first time I've seen you to-day, and you are at it already."

"But then Kretz has shown a preference for the river of late," the girl went on. "I've noticed that he likes to stand upon the wall overlooking it."

"Every man to his own fancy," spoke Mr. Scanlon.

"It may be that it has reminded him of some stream he knew at home in Germany. The banks are rather picturesque, don't you think? At places they are really wonderful!"

The big man rolled himself a cigarette and considered. The river bank, eh? What was all this talk about it—this talk, and other things? He had noticed when he first came to Schwartzberg that the river had a bank; as a matter of fact, it had two of them. But that's all it, or they, had been—just bank, or banks.

"However," his thought continued, as he proceeded with his cigarette, "lately the thing's been getting a whole raft of little attentions. Last night I heard a fellow fall off of it; this morning it attracted Ashton-Kirk greatly. The German, so it seems, likes little walks along and little observations of it from the wall. And, last, the golden one is at great pains to put me up in the facts as she sees them. 'The river bank,' says she, as plain as day. 'Take a good, long, sweeping look at the river bank. And, once seen, do not forget.'"

"I suppose, though," said the girl, "to one who has, like you, Mr. Scanlon, spent a great deal of his life in the wild places, a tame little river like this has no charm."

Bat lit the cigarette and smoked peacefully.

"As you say, the river is tame," said he. "It has a way of slipping by without forcing your notice; and in these days a river, like anything else, if it wants attention, must speak out good and loud. But though I never have fallen for bashful rivers, still river banks, of any denomination whatsoever, have always gone strong with me."

The girl's eyes as she gazed at him were half smiling, half wondering. She said:

"One can never be altogether sure of what you mean."

Bat nodded sorrowfully.

"Too bad, isn't it?" remarked he. "When a fellow's exposed to a thing like that, he's sure to catch it."

Here there was the sound of wheels without ; a bell, evidently in the kitchen, rang loudly. Miss Knowles and Scanlon were still in the courtyard when Mrs. Kretz made her appearance in answer. While the woman was opening the gate the girl said :

"Your friend, Mr. Ashton-Kirk, did not arrive last night, after all?"

"No," replied Bat. "But then, as I said, you never know when to expect him. He's one of those fellows who have their own ideas about things."

The opened gate showed a wagon outside, one which Scanlon had noticed more than once before. A package was handed to Mrs. Kretz, who at once came in and relocked the gate.

Miss Knowles held out her hand as though to take the package. There was a sweet smile upon her face, but in the movement there was a swiftness, an eagerness which Scanlon could not help but notice.

"Not for me!" she said.

"No," replied the woman, sullenly.

"For Miss Hohenlo, then. Give it to me. I will take it to her."



Reluctantly Mrs. Kretz handed her the parcel, and the girl, with a smile and a nod to Scanlon, crossed the courtyard and disappeared.

The woman fumbled at the bolts of the gate for a few moments; it was plain to Bat that she desired to say something but was at a loss as to how to begin.

"You don't care to have any of your work taken off your hands, I see," said he.

The woman shook her head; her heavy face still wore the sullen look.

"Always," she said, "she does that."

"Well," asked Bat, "what of it? I don't see much in her carrying a small package up-stairs. It'll not overtax her."

Mrs. Kretz folded her strong, thick-fingered hands in her apron, and again she shook her head in a stubborn sort of way.

"It is not that," she said. "It is not what you see. It is never what you see in Schwartzberg, but always something else."

"Agreed," said Mr. Scanlon. "That's exactly how I feel about it myself. But," and he looked at her with the interest of a prospector who is about to turn over some fresh soil, "just what is the idea this time?"

"Always," said Mrs. Kretz, "when a parcel comes by the wagon, she is here to see. Never once does she let me take it in myself. And

never once does she take it where it belongs until she has looked inside."

"Ah!" said Scanlon. "I see."

"More than once I have watched," said the woman. "It is not my place, but I want to keep trouble from the house. Hours she will spend looking and searching. Then she will tie the bundle up as it was, and take it to whomever it is for."

Bat considered this for a space.

"The mail now, does she do the same with that?"

"Sometimes," replied the woman, "when it is a package."

"Oh," said Scanlon. "When it's a package, eh? Never when it is anything else?"

"No."

Once more Mr. Scanlon considered.

"That looks," said he, "as if Miss Knowles were interested in the coming of something of some little bulk." He stroked his shaven jaw and looked at the woman. "Now I wonder what it is she's looking for?"

The woman returned the look, and again Scanlon saw she desired to say something, but did not know how to begin.

"What is it?" he asked. "If you've got any suggestions to make, don't be backward."

"If you would see her searching and look-

ing," said the woman, "there is a window near the stable. She always locks herself in that room."

Mrs. Kretz then returned to her kitchen, and Scanlon leaned with his back against the wall and pondered. That he might the better do this, he took out his tobacco pouch and the little sheaf of papers; then he carefully shaped another cigarette. With the pale smoke hovering about him, he turned the question over carefully.

"It stands like this," he told himself. "Something is doing which threatens to scale all the features off a friend of mine. Said friend asks me to give him a help. This I do. In the process of helping I run smack into the fact that the girl he's in love with is on the cross. She stands in with the parties who are trying to get him. Mixed up in her efforts in his direction is a desire to see what's inside all the packages which come to the house. I have a chance, maybe, to find out what the reason is—by peeping in at a window. Question before the committee on morals: Is it permissible to peep under such circumstances?"

Evidently the said committee went into session at once, and a great cloud of smoke arose above its meeting place. Mr. Scanlon, after a space, threw the cigarette away with decision.

"As it's a case of out and out crookedness, the thing can be done without fracturing any of the

finer feelings. Therefore I'll go and get an eye-ful of what she does with the package."

So down the courtyard went Mr. Scanlon ; at the near end of the stable was a grated window some dozen feet from the ground ; a ladder stood under it.

"The Frau Kretz, I suppose, got up this way," said Bat. "Therefore, so shall I."

Peering in through the grating he saw that the room was the one the servants used for storage. At a table stood Miss Knowles, and the parcel, opened, lay before her.

The room was a dark one, but the girl had lighted a large swinging lamp and the rays fell downward upon the table.

The observant eyes of Mr. Scanlon went all about the place ; nothing in the room was missed.

"For you see," mused he, "a fellow, in a case like this, never knows just what belongs to the game being played, and what doesn't."

It was a high ceilinged room, narrow, but long ; shelves were upon two sides of it, shelves loaded with packets and jars and labled boxes.

"How many of them are in on this business of the packet?" was Bat's mental query. "They all look innocent enough, of course ; they seem to be simple things having to do with the kitchen and the preparation of meals. But are they what they seem to be ? Or are they like a good many

things about this house—putting up an innocent front, but, in reality, working as something else.”

The big man had come to a mental state in which he took nothing for granted. His stay at Schwartzberg had been one which shook his confidence in his own judgment; there was nothing his senses told him that he could accept without investigation.

“The good old days when a fellow could take a slant at a thing, and then pass it on, are gone by,” he’d sadly told himself more than once. “And they may never come again.”

The parcel contained papers, small rolls, each tied with a tape. Carefully the girl undid the fastenings of one of these; slowly the sheets were unrolled and separated. Then, one at a time, they passed under the eye of Miss Knowles; one at a time they were laid aside; and when the little packet was examined, it was rerolled and tied with the tape once more. Profound was the amazement of Mr. Scanlon, perched upon the ladder outside; he felt almost like rubbing his eyes; he could scarcely believe his senses. For each sheet of the paper was absolutely blank.

Another and still another of the rolls was gone over in a like manner; each blank sheet was studied; each little packet was faithfully retied; and when all were done, the girl stood looking down at them thoughtfully. The yellow lamp-

light glinted in her hair ; her smooth skin looked inexpressibly fair ; the pink in her cheeks was like the softly-sunned side of a peach. For a long time she stood without moving ; then she assembled the rolls of blank paper and carefully wrapped them as they had been when she received them from Mrs. Kretz. After this she turned off the light, and with the package in her hand she left the room.

Mr. Scanlon stepped down from the ladder, his face a study. Walking the length of the courtyard, his hands in his pockets, his cheeks puffed out like small balloons, he fell once more to pondering. But evidently his cogitations did not bring any enlightenment, for after a while he removed his hands from his pockets and elevated them above his head.

"I'm through," stated he. "I am completely and absolutely through. Every minute I spend in this place puts it up to me more and more plainly that I was never meant for anything but elementary purposes. After this I will gaze and not even try to think. I will record like the camera and the phonograph and leave the developing for a professional. I could stand this stuff about the northwest and also the play of the sick man in the moonlight. But when it comes to otherwise competent young ladies displaying intense interest in sheets of blank paper, I quit."

And once again Mr. Scanlon had recourse to his tobacco pouch ; once again he rolled himself a comforting smoke ; and once again he fell into amazement after amazement regarding the things which were going on about him.

## CHAPTER XVI

### SHOWS HOW THE GREAT SWORD WAS MISSED FROM THE WALL

THE day passed slowly for Scanlon ; he put in a few hours with the newspapers, which were always brought to Schwartzberg about noon ; then he selected an armful of likely looking books and took them to his room.

But the adventures therein related were not to his taste. He was in no humor for the accumulation of unexplained incident ; what he wanted at that particular time was clarity—a breeze which would blow through the edifice of intrigue and drive out the obscuring vapors.

“ This fellow,” remarked he, turning the leaves of one of the books, “ is too much like myself. Here he starts out under a cloud ; and as he goes along, instead of getting rid of it, he adds to it. At page one hundred he has a collection of clouds the like of which I never saw in a book before. Then they proceed to break, and he has a fine little storm on his hands, with thunder and lightning and wind. If it only cleared up then, all right. But it doesn’t. The little old clouds still stick around ; the fellow never gets a chance to do anything, for he can’t see far enough ahead.”



He threw the book upon the table and yawned. Then he proceeded to dress for dinner.

Once more he was surprised to find that Miss Hohenlo would dine with them.

"Really," she declared, girlishly, "I seem to be in splendid spirits. I haven't been keen enough to come down to dinner for ever so long before last night. I don't understand it. There must be something in the air."

"It is very possible," spoke Miss Knowles, smilingly. "I think I have detected it myself."

While the two women talked, Campe engaged his guest in conversation.

"Kretz tells me that there was a stranger about the place to-day," said he, with an assumption of carelessness, but a troubled look in his eyes.

Scanlon nodded easily.

"A sick fellow," said he. "From the inn over yonder. Something of a botanist, I think. He said he was looking for indications."

"Botanists don't usually select November as a time for their work," observed Campe. "That was a subterfuge, and that he thought it necessary to use one shows his intentions to be at least open to question."

Bat acknowledged this with a nod.

"Only a few of us ever lie without a reason," said he.

Miss Hohenlo, who had turned to listen, ges-

tured admiringly and in such a way that her small white hands were well displayed.

"You have such a delightfully straightforward way with you, Mr. Scanlon," she said. "I think it's so refreshing. I suppose it comes of living so long in the West among people who have none of the subtleties of over-civilization, and among the grand wild scenery."

"Maybe," said Bat, "or it might be something else. You can't always put the brand on a straightforward talker, and his reasons for being such, any more than you can on a botanist who picks the wrong time of the year to do his prospecting. I knew a fellow named Cameron once who kept the 'Deuce High' at Cripple Creek, and was the smoothest faro dealer I ever watched. His next best thing was straightforward talk, and he used to reel it out by the mile. Everybody took stock until one night, in the middle of a portion of it, somebody caught him slipping cards from the bottom of the deck. After that they sort of lost confidence."

"Such a wild, reckless life," sighed Miss Hohenlo, her pretty hands before her face, as though to shut it out. "And yet," with an air, "I could almost wish I were a man so that I might take part in it."

"You don't have to be a man to do a little thing like that," said Scanlon. He addressed

Miss Hohenlo, but as he spoke his eyes were upon Miss Knowles. "Some women break the tape with the speediest of men."

"Oh, not really!" exclaimed the spinster. "You can't mean it."

"It's been my experience," said Bat, "that the ladies are not a bit different from men in their undertakings. They just go about it differently."

Miss Knowles laughed a little.

"I'm not quite sure whether you are complimenting us or no," said she. "But I don't agree with you at any rate. No woman, for instance, could have done what you did last night."

Bat shook his head.

"She could," stated he. "What is there to walking quietly down a dark hall? Don't you think a woman would have the nerve to do that?"

Calmly he studied the beautiful face before him, and he saw a deeper tint creep into the pink of her cheeks.

"Oh, perhaps that," said she.

"And more," insisted Bat. "Much more. What did I do but hold a quiet conversation with the burglar as he went about his work. Is that too much for a woman to do? I'll venture that one of them has talked just as quietly with a housebreaker, and almost under the same conditions, before now."

The blue eyes of Miss Knowles fixed themselves upon him in a wide open stare. There was a smile upon her lips, but in the eyes he could see something else—something very like fear.

Campe, as was usual with him, had grown absent-minded, and brooding; apparently his mind was filled with suspicions as to the purpose of the supposed prowler of the morning; at any rate he took no part in the conversation; indeed, he did not seem to hear it.

It was the voice of Miss Hohenlo which broke the silence.

"My dear Grace," said she, "you look frightened. You are really growing weak-nerved. And once I thought you were, as you look, a Brunhilde." She leaned toward the girl, looking at her curiously. "And the mere idea of a woman engaging in such an adventure has frightened you."

Miss Knowles shook her golden head and laughed. Her blue eyes were filled with amusement, the fear having vanished.

"I was trying to imagine myself in such a position. And I think the result was too vivid."

But Mr. Scanlon seemed doubtful.

"I don't think it was that," spoke he, confidently. "It must have been something else. You'd push right through such a situation and never wink an eye."

Miss Hohenlo clasped her hands with delicate satisfaction.

"Oh, Mr. Scanlon," said she, "I'm delighted that you won't permit Grace to think meanly of herself. For, when you've come to know her as I do, she is really a wonderful person." Here the eyes of the two women met in a look so rapid that Scanlon was unable to interpret it. "You are quite right. I have the greatest faith in her courage, and what I said a few moments ago in doubt of it was merely a jest. Grace, you know, would really dare anything."

"Oh, please, Miss Hohenlo," said the girl, in protest.

"You would, my dear; you know you would. It would only require," and here the faded eyes went from the beautiful face of Miss Knowles to the attentive one of Mr. Scanlon, "it would only require an occasion. Let that be sufficient," said Miss Hohenlo, nodding quite positively, "and Grace would be equal to anything."

"I wish," said the girl, "what you say were true. For there are many occasions," and she smiled at Scanlon, "which arise and demand to be met. And I'm afraid I don't do the work very well."

After this Scanlon fell into a silence, not an absent one such as Campe seemed plunged in, but alive and observant. When appealed to he re-

plied briefly, but he did not lose a word or miss an expression of either face.

"Right here," said he, mentally, "is where I break my new-made resolution. For the time being I am not a non-reasoning recorder. I must reason, or I'll sink. And as something seems stirring between the ladies, I don't want to do that."

"You would do anything well, my dear Grace." Here Miss Hohenlo's white hand smoothed her faded hair. "Anything in the world. But being clever and ingenious and persistent, I am sorry to say, does not always bring success. And if you have failed in any of your undertakings it is this, and not yourself, that is to blame."

"I wish I could think so," said the girl. "Perhaps I would then have the energy to go on."

"Energy!" Miss Hohenlo laughed, gently. "Oh, Grace, as if you could ever lack that—you who are energy itself. Mr. Scanlon, please speak to her again; she will insist upon doing herself these little injustices."

The tones of the two women were mild, their looks were kind, their words were inconsequent; and yet underneath all these things the big man seemed to detect a rapid play of meaning.

"It's there," said he, to himself, "but, as usual, I am not getting it. However, one thing is plain—the elderly lady has something on the younger

one; and if it is at all possible, I'm going to find out what it is before the night is done."

In this purpose events seemed to favor Scanlon. Miss Knowles proposed a game of billiards with Campe after dinner, and as Miss Hohenlo declined, Bat declined also; and so he was left alone with her in the great room where the tapestries hung.

The spinster caressed the strings of the gilt harp gently; Bat lounged in a deep chair and talked to her.

"Have you lived in this country very long?" he asked her, finally.

"Only two years," said she.

Bat expressed his astonishment.

"But you speak the language so well," he said.

She laughed, and the harp murmured under her touch.

"You are thinking of my having lived in Mexico, or in Germany, before that," she said.

"Well, I have. But, you see, I was educated in England and the United States."

"Oh, yes," said the big man; "that accounts for it then." He watched her for a little and listened to the soft sounds she drew from the strings. "But Miss Knowles," he said, "she speaks the language very well also."

"She should," replied Miss Hohenlo calmly, "seeing that she is American."

"No," said Bat, apparently much amazed. "I was sure she was German."

Miss Hohenlo laughed quietly.

"It is very easy for Grace to create impressions," she said. "She has talent in that direction."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she had a lot of it," agreed Mr. Scanlon. "But it was the yellow hair and so on, I guess, that made me think her a German."

"She dresses to conform with the background," said Miss Hohenlo gently. "Dear Grace, she is such a beauty. The braids of yellow hair and the strength of her outline go very well with a place like Schwartzberg."

"You've been together a long time," said Mr. Scanlon, "and you think a lot of her, I know."

"She's been with me since Frederic's father died," said Miss Hohenlo. "She was the daughter of a friend and business partner. I am very fond of her."

"I think," said Mr. Scanlon, carefully, "your nephew is, also."

"Frederic!" Miss Hohenlo struck the strings and they reverberated thrillingly. "He loves her."

"I had supposed something like that was the case," admitted Bat. "He never said anything, you know, but a fellow can usually size up these matters." There was a pause during which the



narp spoke murmuringly, and Bat kept the time upon the arms of his chair with his fingers. "And do you know, when I did finally size it up," he added, "it gave me a little start."

The beautiful hands left the strings and clasped themselves together; Miss Hohenlo turned an incredulous face toward the speaker.

"Gave *you* a start!" she said. "Oh, Mr. Scanlon, one can't imagine anything like that."

"Well," said Bat, "maybe you wouldn't think so, seeing I pull the scales at about two-thirty, and was brought up outside. But start I did on that occasion."

"But why?" and the dull eyes of the spinster were full of wonder. "Why?"

"Your nephew," said the big man, "is a friend of mine. And a fellow never likes to see a friend venturing into a thing which might not be right."

Miss Hohenlo shook one pretty finger at him girlishly.

"Oh, you bachelors," she said; "you have such a dread of marriage."

"Nature always fixes it for its creations," said Bat. "If it can't provide you with a courage to meet a thing, it supplies a fear which makes you duck and in that way save yourself. But," he frowned at a rug on the floor before him, and stroked his chin, "it wasn't marriage I was thinking of."

"No?"

"No," said Bat, "it was the girl."

His eyes were still on the rug, but for all that he caught the sudden tenseness of her attitude.

"Grace!" she said, and there was a sharpness in her voice which was new to him. "What do you mean?"

The big man studied the rug under his bent brows. He felt that the situation, now that he had brought it to this point, was a delicate one, and knew that he must be careful. Indeed, it was so exceedingly delicate and required so much care that under other circumstances he would not have ventured the framing of it. But he wanted to help Campe; his curiosity was aroused, and he felt convinced that there was something hostile between the two women. And so he launched himself upon waters which might prove a mill pond or a whirlpool.

"Miss Knowles," stated he, "is a good looker. She's got a figure that has the best of them looking like cripples, and I never want to see a nicer smile. Along these lines she's an ace, and I have nothing but praise for her."

"But," said Miss Hohenlo, attentively, "along some others you feel that you can *not* praise her."

Bat acknowledged this by a gesture.

"Not that I am very definite in the matter," said he, "for I'm not. You see——" but he

stopped short as he was about to add something else, and after looking into the dull, uninteresting face before him, he said : " You've been here at Schwartzberg for some time, I suppose."

" Since early summer. When Frederic wrote that he was here and meant to stay for a time, I was overjoyed. You see, I love the memory of the old count, my ancestor, and this place is so full of him."

" Being given to staying indoors and to music and such," said Bat, " you'd not be likely to see as much or notice as many things as some one who goes about more; but, for all that, you must have seen that there's something adrift here in Schwartzberg."

Miss Hohenlo arose; leaving the harp, she walked to a window and stood for a moment looking out into the darkness. When she turned, the dull eyes were filled with tears; the small face was piteous with pleading. All the affectation had vanished; her manner was simple and direct.

" Mr. Scanlon," she said, " you are a friend of Frederic's, and I am glad of the chance to talk with you upon this subject. As you say, there is something adrift in Schwartzberg; I've been aware of it for months. But my nephew is unapproachable upon the subject; I am ashamed to say he is more like a frightened child than a man whose life has been put in danger."

"It's sunk deep," acknowledged Bat. "And it may even get worse."

The beautiful hands went out in a despairing gesture at this.

"Oh, I hope not!" she exclaimed. "For his sake I hope not. And it's a torture to me to see him so." She was silent for a moment, and then went on: "I have given him every opportunity to confide in me, but he will not. And so, Mr. Scanlon, I am like a stranger. Danger, even death, perhaps, is hovering over the house, and I know nothing except the little that comes to me by chance."

"Since I've been here I've felt about the same way," said Scanlon, "though, of course, I haven't so much reason as you."

"I could not speak to Frederic, and I must not speak to the servants. So," said Miss Hohenlo, "there was left only—Grace."

Again there came the pause, this time longer than before. Finally Scanlon said:

"Well?"

She came nearer to him. Never had she looked plainer or more angular; never had her eyes seemed duller or her hair with less life.

"But I could not speak to her. There was a something which stood between us—perhaps the same feeling which you had—and it held me back." One of the delicate hands went out and

rested on Scanlon's sleeve. "What is it?" she asked.

But the big man could only shake his head.

"At times," said Miss Hohenlo, "she comes to me with the strangest requests. They seem to be without meaning, and yet, somehow, I am afraid of them."

"Requests?"

"They seem silly," said the spinster, a dazed look in the dull eyes. "I've tried to give a meaning to them, but never could. For example, she'll often, of an evening, ask me to go to a window and pretend to be interested in the direction of the wind. And she makes me promise not to tell."

"Huh!" said Mr. Scanlon.

"Then she has a way of jesting about my playing of the harp, and of other things which seem to be odd in tone and in meaning. I've never been able to understand them."

Scanlon nodded; he could readily see this as the things had made the same impression upon himself. Then, guardedly, he began to speak. Little by little he told Miss Hohenlo of the numerous things which had attracted his attention to Miss Knowles since his arrival at Schwartzberg. And when he had done, she stood staring at him like a small scared animal.

"It's dreadful!" she said. "Who would ever have dreamed of such a thing?"

From the courtyard there came a dull complaining sound.

"Hello," said Scanlon, in surprise; "what's that?"

"It's the gate," spoke Miss Hohenlo. "Some one is opening it."

The night, though the month was November, was an exceedingly mild one, and the windows were partly open. Through one of these they looked down into the courtyard. Kretz was at the gate drawing the bolts, and beside him stood Miss Knowles, a long, muffling wrap hanging to her feet.

"She is going out," breathed Miss Hohenlo.

The big gate creaked open, and for a moment the girl and the grim-faced German spoke in low tones. He seemed expostulating, but she appeared to brush his words aside as being of no consequence. Suddenly their talk ceased. Campe appeared, a cap upon his head, a stick in his hand.

"Frederic!" Miss Hohenlo was amazed. "He, too, is going!"

The gate swung to behind them, and the sergeant-major shot the bolts.

"The last night those two were out there among the hills," said Scanlon, "he was slashed—and maybe with the sword which she had taken out of this room."

At this a cry came from the woman.

"Look!" she gasped, and pointed toward the narrow strip of tapestry between the windows, the place where the great sword usually hung.

"By Jingo!" cried Scanlon. "It's gone!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### SPEAKS OF A HARP WHICH WAS PLAYED IN SILENCE

THERE hung the long strip of tapestry between the two windows, but the huge naked blade which usually rested against it was missing. For a moment or two Scanlon could not take his eyes from the spot ; he was fascinated by the possibilities of the discovery.

"Where can it be?" asked Miss Hohenlo.  
"What could it have been taken for?"

Bat took his eyes from the place where the sword had hung, and they fixed themselves upon the speaker.

"Under the circumstances," said he, "and in the face of what I've just told you, can't you imagine what it *might* have been taken for?"

She put her hands before her face as if to shut out the idea.

"Oh, no!" she said, helplessly. "No! Surely not that!"

"Well," said Scanlon, and he drew a deep breath as he said it, "maybe not. But I've



caught the notion so strongly that I don't think I'll take a chance."

"You mean ——" and she looked at him fearfully.

"I'm going to horn into whatever is fixed to take place. And, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to do it now."

Swiftly the big man left the room and lightly he ran down the stairs.

"The gate!" said he to Kretz, who stood in the courtyard. "Open it!"

The man stood looking at him, a curious expression upon his face; for a moment it seemed to Scanlon that he was about to refuse.

"Quick!" said Scanlon. All the suspicions that he'd had of the German since coming to Schwartzberg were brought to a head in an instant. His strong jaw grew rigid and his tone was almost menacing.

The sergeant-major threw the bolts and turned the keys sullenly. As the gate opened, Scanlon passed out.

The big man looked about. The moon lurked behind the heavy mass of clouds which covered the sky, but some of its radiance trickled through and made things visible in a dim sort of way. Along the path leading west from the castle he detected a movement, and at once he set out in that direction.

"I've heard of something like this once or twice before," murmured he. "Decoys have been used since men began to find it was surer to hit when the punch wasn't expected. Though," and he shoved out his chin, "I can't say the facts make her that sort of a decoy. If there's a blow to be struck, it seems to me, she'll strike it herself."

Scanlon's stride was long and quiet; the path was of well-beaten earth and free of stones, so he stepped out freely without fear of detection. Finally he began to make out the figures ahead of him.

"There they are," said he, "and going along very contentedly." He put a hand to each side of his mouth and lifted his voice. "Hello!" he called.

Young Campe wheeled like a flash, his hand going to his hip.

"All right," said Scanlon. "You needn't trouble about that."

He approached hastily, his hands upraised.

"Bat!" said Campe, in surprise.

"We hadn't expected you, Mr. Scanlon," spoke Miss Knowles, sweetly.

"No, I suppose not," said the big man, and his tone was dry. "I just thought I'd take a stretch along the path."

"It's such a splendid night for that," said Miss Knowles.

"Not too bright," exclaimed Campe. "A fellow doesn't make such a target as he would on a moonlit night. And yet with plenty of light to see by."

"Moonlight has its disadvantages, of course," admitted Mr. Scanlon. "And with matters as they now seem to be, you can't do better than figure everything in."

The girl and the young man went along on the path, and doggedly Scanlon followed.

"It always pays," he continued, "not to slip anything when it comes to a calculation. Doing that has cost many a man his life—and even more. I recall one time out in the Black Hills country—but," inquiringly, "maybe you don't care to hear about that just now."

"Oh, yes, please," said Miss Knowles.

"I was riding with Captain Marsh's troop in chase of some Sioux who'd raided a little place called 'Soldier Hat.' They'd taken all the fire-water they could lug—this, like as not, being the principal object of the raid—and then headed for a camp they had among the rocks. We got word six hours later, and made good time after them."

"In the night?" asked Miss Knowles.

"It was night when we pulled up about half a mile from their camp. Marsh wanted to see just how things lay for a rush on them; he didn't ask any of his men to go, but went himself. He'd figured on everything, so he thought, but when

he'd crept within fifty feet of where the Sioux lay asleep something began to strike the stones—chink—chank—chink—chank !”

“His spurs,” said Miss Knowles.

“He'd figured on his spurs, and taken them off. But his sword had slipped and began to trail ; before he could snatch it up the camp was awake, and in two minutes the reds were off. The one thing he hadn't taken into his calculations,” said the big man, slowly, “was the sword. And that's what gave him away.”

“Oh, what a pity,” said the girl. She turned her head and looked over her shoulder at Scanlon as she spoke ; it was too shadowy to catch the expression in her face, but in her voice was that little break which is apt to appear when one's breath is short and quickly taken. “Success meant so much to him, too, I suppose.”

“He'd had his chance and missed it,” said Bat. “And,” shaking his head, “who'd ever have thought of such a thing as that giving him away ?”

The girl drew the long muffling wrap about her carefully ; she shivered a little.

“I had no idea it would be so cold,” she said.

“Perhaps we'd better return,” said Campe, solicitously.

“If you don't mind,” she said. “I'm really chilled.”

The big man smiled satirically through the gloom as he trailed along behind, but now in the direction of the castle.

"She's pretty clever," he thought, "and got plenty of nerve, but it takes long experience in any game to stand up under the unexpected little shock. That's the thing that usually gets them when they're off their balance, and spills the beans all over the place."

Kretz seemed surprised when he opened the gate for them ; his eyes sought out those of the girl, but she passed into the house quickly.

"You did not stay," said the sergeant-major to Campe.

"No ; it was not so pleasant as it seemed."

Kretz shook his head and muttered something and Scanlon felt his eyes still upon them as they entered the narrow doorway.

Miss Knowles had gone on up the stairs ; they could hear her feet pat-patting quickly on the stones. Campe seemed about to follow when Scanlon said :

"If you are not doing anything particular for the next half hour, I'd like to speak to you."

"Certainly," said Campe.

They entered the big room hung with the heads of boars and stags and the trophies of arms.

"I am going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle," remarked Mr. Scanlon, calmly, as he stood beside

one of the massive oaken tables. "Sit down, light a pipe, and listen."

From a shelf he took a stone jar and a brace of pipes, with bowls of baked clay and long reed stems. The pipes were filled with tobacco from the jar and lighted; then they sat down at the table facing each other. Campe smoked quietly, tilted back in his chair, his eyes upon the floor. Scanlon examined him keenly, with the manner of a man who had something of a job before him, and meant to go about it as carefully as he could.

"It was pretty close to three weeks ago that I first came here," said he. "And in those three weeks I've had a sort of miscellaneous time."

"I hope you've enjoyed yourself," spoke Campe. "I'm afraid I've been rather lacking in many ways, but things are in such shape with me just now that ——"

Here Bat stopped him with a wave of the hand.

"The shape that things are in with you just now," said the big man, "is what this talk is going to be about. You couldn't have brought the thing forward at a better moment."

Campe's fingers tapped nervously upon the edge of the table; Scanlon blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling and watched it curl and shift formlessly.

"You've never told me why you asked me here," said the big man. "And I never asked. But

just the same I dropped to the facts in the first couple of days."

Campe placed his pipe upon the table, and stared at the speaker with frightened eyes.

"Do you mean ——" he began.

"No," said Bat, interrupting him, "I *don't* mean that. What the inside of this affair of yours is—the real reason for it all—I don't know. But in the outside I am pretty well informed. You are cooped up here with enemies all about you. Now at a single glance, a fellow wouldn't say they were a very dangerous lot; but," wrinkling his forehead, "I've seen them work a little, and I'll say for them that they've got stuff I can't hit; and from all appearances, it's the same way with you."

Here Scanlon paused and took a few pulls at the pipe to assure himself that the tobacco was still burning. Campe said nothing during the silence, and the big man took occasion to go on.

"As you never volunteered anything," said he, "I didn't think it was my place to ask questions. So I've watched the thing move along, and all the time it got tighter and tighter, and sharper and sharper; and now, to-night, I feel that I can't draw another full breath until I tell you what I think, and what you ought to do."

"Well?" said Campe.

"In a civilized community," said Scanlon, "the

first thing a man does, when pestered as you're being, is to call in the cops. That you've kept so close, both with me and the cops, shows that you've got a secret on your hands—something that you're not anxious to spread around."

"Well?" asked the young man once more.

"I'm not trying to pry into your affairs," spoke Scanlon. "I don't want to know the object of the parties at the inn. And I'm not advising you to consult the police, if you think you ought not to do so. But what I am wanting you to do is to carry your idea regarding me a step further."

"I hardly think I understand you," said the other, looking at Scanlon searchingly.

"You will in a minute," spoke the big man. "I was called in to help, wasn't I? Good! But, willing and all as I was, I wasn't the right party. I can handle small matters that are set down plainly for the eye to see, but what you really want is a man that's capable of putting the hook into those that the eye can't see, and one, at the same time, not having anything to do with the police."

Campe smiled faintly.

"That is an ideal combination," said he. "But where is such a person to be found?"

"I think," said Scanlon, "that I could provide such a one if you feel inclined to talk to him—a fellow who is naturally put together for getting to



the bottom of things. I've seen him do one or two stunts since I've known him that were fancy bits of reasoning, and I've been told of some others that made my eyebrows curl."

There was a silence of some duration. The young man took up the pipe once more and re-lighted it. Finally he spoke.

"There is no use in my attempting to deny the situation here at Schwartzberg," said he, slowly. "I had hoped to keep it hidden, but the last few days have shown me that such a thing is impossible. Your judgment that the thing behind it all is one which I hesitate to make public is correct. At first I wanted to fight it out—alone, but I see that this, also, cannot be done."

He leaned toward Scanlon, his hands upon the edge of the table, desperation in his eyes.

"I need help," he said. "I need it perhaps as badly as it was ever needed before. For not only is my life in danger, but my sanity as well."

"Tut! tut!" said the big man. "Hold tight! We'll get you out of this with everything standing."

"That there is some one whom you know—a private person—who has shown cleverness in entanglements brought to his notice is, perhaps, fortunate." The young man looked at Scanlon, his face twitching nervously. "But I'll have to give the matter some consideration. I am not

sure that I can take any one into my confidence without doing an injustice."

He got up and stood for some time troubled of face and with the pinched, hollow look which Scanlon had watched since coming to the castle. Then he said, simply:

"I think I'm tired now, Bat, and I'll go to bed. Somehow," and his smile was wan and a little piteous, "I don't seem as able as I was a short time ago. This thing has taken some of the snap out of me." He shook the big man by the hand, adding, "Thanks, old man, for the way you've taken this thing, and also for the offer regarding your friend. I'll turn him over in my mind for a little, and then I'll tell you just what I've concluded to do."

After he had gone Bat sat at the oaken table and smoked. Three times he refilled the pipe with the reed stem, and three times he knocked out the ash. Then he also arose to his feet.

"I think he's about ripe for a consultation with Kirk," he told himself. "And the quicker he makes up his mind to it, the better. For this little game is getting so close that I'm beginning to feel it pinch."

He yawned widely and started for his room.

Now, after the way of most big outdoor men, Mr. Scanlon, in his moments of relaxation, was not at all light footed. Neither was he naturally

given to stealthy ways. But since coming to Schwartzberg he had acquired both.

"They have fallen upon me like a couple of garments," he had acknowledged to himself more than once. "And I've got to going around as softly as a pair of gum shoes shot through a Maxim silencer."

It was in the hall, not far from the head of the stairs, that he had seen the soft man on the night before; this fact must have been subconsciously active, for he now slowly lifted his head above the level of the floor, his eyes, as he did so, glancing swiftly ahead. Both the hall and the stairway were dim; and before his eye had caught anything, his ear got a soft step and the gentle closing of a door.

"The golden Helen," he said, a moment later, as he caught the outlines of Miss Knowles. "What now, I wonder?"

With the light foot and the stealthy manner, Bat had acquired the habit of suspicion. He had reached the state where every movement which he did not understand was an occasion for inquiry; each unexplained sound caused him to prick up his ears. Under ordinary circumstances the gentle closing of the door and the quiet movements of Miss Knowles would have passed unnoticed.

"But these are no ordinary times," he told himself. "The golden one is a very busy person, and

so, when she goes pit-patting around, there's no harm in looking after her."

The girl flitted down the hall, and Scanlon quietly followed. But in the dusk he lost sight of her. Reaching the place where he had last seen her, he stared around ; but nothing but shadows met his eye.

"Gone into one of the rooms," said he to himself. "But which, and why?"

As he could think of nothing to do in the matter, he was turning away ; but just then a thought struck him. At the next turn in the hall was the staircase leading to the next floor.

"Suppose she has gone up there?" said he.

The floor above was not used by any of the members of the household, though all the rooms were completely furnished and open. Why any one should go up there Mr. Scanlon could not think.

"But," reasoned he, "in Schwartzberg you can never tell. So I'll climb the stairs just for luck."

He proceeded to do so, not neglecting his light step. The upper hall was in complete darkness, save for what faint light the windows admitted, and he stood at the head of the stairs, looking carefully up and down. After a pause he started along the passage ; half-way to its end he stopped suddenly.

A dozen steps away was an alcove, about which were some partly drawn hangings. These stirred gently as though moved by a breeze.

"A window is open," said Scanlon, mentally. "And some one is sitting by it."

He remained motionless in the shadow and watched. Yes; some one was there. A moment or two told him more.

"I'm sure those are the folds of a white gown," he told himself. "The golden Helen is in the alcove. But what's the idea?"

Now Mr. Scanlon was quite sure of one thing. And that was that no one would seek this unusual place and at such an hour without some purpose. He fancied he caught a glint of a polished surface at those points where the dim light caught it; then he became aware of a curious shape which he could not altogether make out. Cautiously he shortened the distance between himself and the alcove. And now he saw something else. Between him and the patch of sky which showed through the window was a series of perpendicular bars—very fine, and very close together. As he followed these up and down he gradually began to sense the shape of the other thing which had puzzled him. Then like a flash he got it all. The thing was a harp—a gilt harp—upon which the faint light was glancing, and the fine bars between him and the sky were its strings.

Motionless, Bat stood and looked. The harp! Well, and then what? Firmly fixed in the back of his mind for some days was the idea that he'd hear more of the harp before the matter in hand was done.

"And not in a musical way, either," was his thought. "That instrument means something else, and I'll gamble that, when it comes out, it'll be something of interest."

Again he stood watching. He had a feeling of movement behind the hangings; to be sure the breeze stirred them now and then; but it was not that.

"It's the girl," he said, mentally. "And she's putting something over. But what?"

Across the strings of the harp stole a shadowy hand. Bat listened for a sound, but none came. Again came the hand, and still again, but no sound followed.

"She's playing," he told himself. "Playing, and yet the strings are silent."

Amazed he stood and watched the shadowy flitting, but the strings were still mute. And then, somehow, there came to the watcher's mind the scene on the moonlit hilltop the night before when the invalid sat mutely in his chair and gazed at Schwartzberg.

And with this Mr. Scanlon gave it up. As softly as he had come, just so softly did he go;

and when he reached his own room, he said, bewilderedly :

“ This is what comes of breaking a resolution ! I said I'd not try to reason out any more of these things, but I broke the vow and am punished. But here, on 'this spot, I renew it. Come what will, or go what may, I am through ! ”

And with that Mr. Scanlon went to bed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DEALS MAINLY WITH SOME NEWS FROM MEXICO

THE next day at Schwartzberg was uneventful. Scanlon saw very little of Campe, and nothing at all of either of the ladies. Kretz was silent and in no way interesting.

Once, about the middle of the afternoon, Bat took a walk along the river bank, but he saw nothing which caught his attention, and he did not go far. The remainder of the day he lounged about, smoking and reading. The day following was even more dull ; except for a gallop in the morning with Campe on a pair of well conditioned horses, the time was altogether unprofitable. Then two more days passed, one duller than the other.

"Even some light reasoning would be welcome," complained the big man, "but there's nothing new to reason about."

Upon the fifth day, having seen nothing of the crime specialist, Scanlon made up his mind to pay a casual visit to the inn.

"It may be," said he, "that he's just curling up for a sight of me. And there may be important news to pass on."



But he got no sight of the jaundiced man at the hostelry ; indeed, there was no one in view but the round bodied landlord, who laughed at Mr. Scanlon's jokes and was as affable as ever.

Bat tramped back to Schwartzberg in a thoughtful mood.

"A dead calm," said he. "Complete and absolute. And not a sail in sight. But," with a lift of the eyebrows, "maybe it's that thing I've so often heard of—the calm before the storm."

In the middle of the afternoon the bell at the gate rang, and a little later Kretz came in with a telegram.

"For Mr. Scanlon," said the German.

The big man tore open the envelope. As he expected, it was from Ashton-Kirk, and read :

" 'See me in the city at nine o'clock to-night.' "

"Anything important?" asked Campe who was watching him.

"I'm called to the city," replied Bat. He glanced at a time table, and added : "However, I'll not leave until after dinner."

"Back to-morrow?"

"More than likely."

During the time that had passed since his talk with Scanlon as to the danger which threatened him, Campe had not once recurred to the subject. But that he bore it well in mind Scanlon was confident.

"He's thinking it over," the big man had concluded. "He'll come to it when he's good and ready."

But the telegram from the special detective was almost an assurance that Fuller's report had been received ; and if this were so, Ashton-Kirk would, in all probability, soon be ready to take some step, no matter what Campe's attitude.

At seven-thirty Scanlon boarded a way train, and an hour later he was in the city ; a taxi took him to Ashton-Kirk's door, and Stumph showed him at once to his friend's study.

"How are you," said Ashton-Kirk, as he shook Scanlon, smilingly, by the hand, "and how did you leave every one at Schwartzberg?"

"I'm fine," said Bat. "But there's not much stirring at the castle. After one mad outburst of enthusiasm, everything seems to have come to a stand."

The crime specialist nodded.

"The besieging army has not been very active, then," said he. "I rather expected that."

"You'd know more about the folks at the inn than I would," said Bat. "I went over there yesterday for the first time in days. But no one was around. When did you leave?"

"If I had taken the hints the landlord and help gave me," said Ashton-Kirk, grimly, "I'd have left the first day. I understand the statement of

the other hotel keeper very well now ; you know he told me that new guests never stayed long at the inn."

"They didn't want you, eh?" Scanlon chuckled. "Well, what could they do with a perfect stranger around, and all of them up to their ears in important private business?"

"But for once, anyhow, they failed," said the special detective. "I needed a certain length of time to collect what facts I was after, and that time I was bound to stay. They did everything short of burn the place about my ears, but I ignored their efforts and talked about my liver. I got all the information I wanted by last night, and as Burgess wired me that Fuller's report had arrived, I left this morning."

"I sort of thought you'd had word from Mexico," said Bat. "But before you tell me what it is, maybe I'd better unload my further experiences at Schwartzberg."

"Very well," agreed the other, quietly.

Thereupon the big man proceeded to relate all that had befallen him since seeing the crime specialist upon the river bank in the guise of a jaundiced man. Ashton-Kirk listened with interest and with narrowed eyes, and when the other had finished, he rose to his feet.

"One of the most curious things in all this business of investigation," said he, "is the way

things have of falling together. At times this is not only bizarre, but also astounding."

"Miss Knowles seems to be a fairly industrious lady, doesn't she?" said Bat. "Early and late she's on the job. I couldn't get anything out of the business with the harp, though I'm sure she has a pretty well fixed purpose; but the little game of the sword was plain enough."

The detective made no reply, but took a cigarette from a box upon the table, lighted it and began pacing the floor.

"It's not easy to believe that a woman with a face like Miss Knowles could put together a little job like that, though," said Scanlon, also lighting a cigarette. "If I hadn't seen the thing working itself out, I wouldn't have believed it. And it took some nerve, after she failed once, to get him out there among the hills so that she could take another swipe at him."

Ashton-Kirk nodded and went on with his smoking and his pacing.

"But," said Bat, inquiringly, "why the sword? If she is leagued with these people to do away with Campe, why isn't it enough to do it in the readiest way? Why must it be done with the big blade from the tapestry room?"

But the other's mind seemed to be moving in another channel.

"This parcel," said he, "which you saw deliv-

ered, and which Miss Knowles at once took charge of—you are quite sure it contained only blank paper?”

“I didn’t see it opened,” replied Bat. “But I saw it repacked, and that’s all that went back into it.”

Ashton-Kirk smiled in a dreamy sort of way; the smoke wreathed above his head and his eyes were half closed.

“Did you notice,” he asked, “how the package was wrapped?”

“Just heavy manila paper,” said Bat, “and tied with a kind of a mixed colored string.”

The dreamy smile deepened; the face of Ashton-Kirk grew out of the smoke wreaths like a nodding Buddha, so utterly peaceful was it.

“That’s very interesting,” said he, in a pleased tone. “This little matter of yours shows more and more quality with every step.” He paced up and down the floor, still smoking and still with the smile upon his face. “And it was after the receipt of this parcel that the sword was missed from its place upon the wall?”

“It was,” answered Bat, staring. “But look here! You seem to be connecting these two things; for my part, I can’t see them even near to each other.”

“To-morrow, perhaps,” said Ashton-Kirk, “we’ll take a few moments to explain things. Just now,

however, there is work to do of a more serious nature."

He went to a cabinet and opening a drawer took out some typed sheets.

"Fuller telegraphed his report in a private cipher," said he, "and this is the translation. He was rather fortunate in the matter, for one of his first queries put him upon the track of exactly the people he was after—those who knew young Campe's father both privately and as a business man, who were Americans and were willing to talk. Within twenty-four hours he had these facts," tapping the sheets, "on the wire."

He then read :

" "The Campes in Mexico seem to have been a family that held the respect and good will of the community. Their business dealings were always carried on on a high plane, and they were personally affable and easily approached. For years success marked all their ventures ; their undertakings brought rich returns and seemed constantly increasing.

" "The house was seldom for very long out of the public eye. However, about five years ago, there came a lull in their doings. Their ventures were few ; and in the completion of some large contracts they were known to have borrowed money.

" "This lull continued for about the space of a year, and seemed to grow more and more pronounced. The public was unaware of anything wrong, but those on the inside knew that the

Campes had lost a very great deal of money ; and as time passed it was a question as to whether they would recover or no.

“ ‘ But, suddenly, recover they did, and brilliantly. Some of their copper holdings developed amazingly, and in a short time they were going along at their usual winning pace, just as though nothing had ever happened. During this commercial halt, if I may so call it, I find there was also a sort of social one. And as you asked me to pay special attention to the friends of the head of the house, I looked into their social sagging with a good deal of interest.

“ ‘ In its efforts to regain its financial footing during the time of depression, the house of Campe dealt with people with whom it would have hesitated to associate itself in days more flush. Also it made acquaintances, possibly through these dealings, with people who were entirely unknown in those circles in which the family had always moved. One of these in particular was a man named Alva, who had once been a professor of physics at Chapultepec. He was, I understand, a peculiar sort of person, a cripple, who made a boast of his Indian ancestry. Alva bore a bad reputation, and was considered wonderfully clever in many ways. There was another of these new made friends—an American—named Evans, a fat, smooth individual ——’ ”

“ Hello ! ” exclaimed Mr. Scanlon, in recognition, “ do I once more meet my friend of the covered bridge ? ”

“ ‘ This American, ’ ” continued Ashton-Kirk, his

eyes still upon the sheets, " 'is known to have been in various sorts of trouble in Honduras and Guatemala ; but just what these offenses were I have not been able to learn. However, the Guatemalan Minister of Police of the period in which these things took place is now that country's Minister at Washington ; something might be learned from him. During the period of the Campe family's depression, Frederic Campe, father to the Frederic now in the United States, was quite intimate with both Alva and Evans. They were received frequently at his house and, apparently, highly esteemed. But when the financial turn came, this intimacy grew less apparent ; finally it ceased altogether. It was probably a year after this that Frederic Campe met his death on board his yacht.' "

The special detective laid the sheets upon the table, and looked at Scanlon.

" Well," he asked, " what do you think ? "

" To me," replied that gentleman, " it looks as though you'd hit the thing fair on the point that last day I was here. Some kind of an understanding was had with this man Alva and the other fellow, Evans. But the elder Campe broke it off after he got flush again ; they hung on and kept insisting on his doing whatever it was that he'd promised to do. He refused, and they finally ' got him.' "

The detective laughed.

" Good ! " said he. " My theory as to what



might possibly have happened and Fuller's report you've put together very well indeed."

"But," ventured Scanlon, "though it might be clever enough, this guessing at things won't get us anything unless we carry it further." He looked at the crime specialist inquiringly. "What do you think we'd better do next?"

Ashton-Kirk pressed one of the series of call bells, then he lighted another cigarette.

"I'd like to have just a little more information about this man Alva," said he. "He interests me immensely. Atavism is one of the most curious and fascinating things in the world," he continued, as he rested against one corner of the table, his singular eyes upon the big man. "One never knows when to expect it, and it sometimes takes the most peculiar of forms. A strain of blood, a physical peculiarity will suddenly appear after an absence of generations, and ——"

Here there came a knock upon the door, and a small compactly built man entered the room.

"Burgess," spoke the crime specialist, "early in the morning go down to Parker's and borrow a surveying outfit—a complete one—tell him not to miss anything, and also to tell you how they're used."

"Enough to go through the motions?" said the compact man with a grin.

"Exactly. Then take O'Neil and go out on the

first train you can get to Marlowe Furnace. Find a place called Schwartzberg up along the river on the west bank, and about a mile above the station. Make that the center of your movements for the day; don't get out of hearing of the usual signal, and when you do hear it make for the house at once."

Burgess nodded.

"Right," said he. "And all the time we are hanging around we'll be busy laying off the land with the surveyor's stuff, eh?"

"Yes," replied Ashton-Kirk.

"Anything else?" asked the man.

"No."

Burgess nodded and took his departure.

Ashton-Kirk, in spite of the fact that he had talked freely upon certain points of the case with Scanlon, had said little or nothing as to his movements in the immediate future.

Nevertheless there was something in the air of the study which seemed to promise action—sharp, light-producing action—and the big man was pleased.

"You seem to be getting ready for a little something," spoke Mr. Scanlon.

The other smiled.

"To-morrow, more than likely, will be a busy day," said he, "and it's always best to prepare for such a little ahead."

“What do you expect to happen?” asked Mr. Scanlon, curiously.

“Anything. But one thing will almost surely take place. And that is : the Campe matter will be solved for good and all.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN WHICH ASHTON-KIRK PAYS HIS SECOND VISIT TO SCHWARTZBERG

SCANLON was not at all an impatient man, but the length of time consumed by Ashton-Kirk next morning over his toilet and his breakfast rather put him on edge.

"I like to see a man fussy about his appearance," said he to himself. "It's a sign that he's in health. Breakfast is also a good sign. The fellow that can cheerfully face his morning meal is usually all right inside. But both things can be carried to extremes. When there's pressing matters to be carried through what matter how you look ; when a puzzle of weeks' standing is about to turn over on its edge and give a last kick, a chop, an egg and a roll shouldn't be the things to interfere with its doing."

But though the big man was in a highly excited state, Ashton-Kirk was as calm as an August afternoon. He smoked a good-sized cigar after breakfast and read the newspapers. To the amazement of Mr. Scanlon he even showed interest in such things as the tariff, the building of a new cup defender, and the international aspect of canal tolls.

However, at about ten o'clock, a long telegram came ; when he read this his inactivity ceased ; at once he rang for his car, and when it arrived he and the big man got in. It was a brisk, sunny November day, and they sped through the city streets and finally into the country roads with that smoothness and ease possible to the modern automobile. They flashed by the little station at Marlowe Furnace and across the covered bridge ; then, as they climbed the first hill on the west bank, they sighted the towers of Schwartzberg.

"And also two very industrious surveyors," said Ashton-Kirk, his keen eye picking out two small figures in the distance, who appeared deeply absorbed in the measuring of some land.

Mr. Scanlon was pleased with the whole idea, and said so.

"It may be," said he, "that we'll need a little help. And this is about as good a way to have a couple of willing lads hanging around as a fellow could think of."

Sergeant-Major Kretz was upon the wall ; when the car drew up at the gate he scrambled down inside. A moment or two later the gate was opened, and Campe, much surprised, made his appearance.

"Back again," said the big man, cheerfully, as he got out, followed by the investigator. "Everything all right?"

"Everything," replied the young man. He shook hands with Ashton-Kirk, and added : "I'm very glad to see you again."

Scanlon looked about. There was no one within ear-shot, so he remarked :

"You didn't say anything further about that matter we talked about the other night, so I thought I'd help you make up your mind by bringing my friend to see you."

If he expected young Campe to show surprise at hearing that Ashton-Kirk was the person mentioned in that conversation, Scanlon was disappointed. The young man merely said, quietly :

"It was rather a difficult thing to solve for myself. I'm glad that you've done it for me." Then addressing the special detective, he added : "Will you come in ?"

The car was driven into the courtyard ; then the two men followed Campe into the house. When they had seated themselves at a table in one corner of the trophy-hung room, Ashton-Kirk said :

"It is always more or less presumptuous to interfere in the private affairs of another. However, there are times, and all persons of experience have encountered them, when this does not hold good. A man occasionally gets into such deep water that he is helpless ; at the same time there

may be reasons, as I understand there are in your case, which may prevent his asking for help."

Young Campe regarded the speaker attentively.

"Well?" said he.

The long fingers of Ashton-Kirk pattered upon the edge of the table; he met the gaze of the other with steady eye.

"In such cases," said he, "comparison usually figures very strongly. Some danger threatens a man. But he fears to appeal for help. Why? Because the thing which threatens is as nothing compared with another thing which a call for help might expose."

Scanlon saw the peaked face of young Campe twitch, but the intent look never left his eyes.

"What more?" asked he.

"And yet it may be," said Ashton-Kirk, "that this hidden thing may be none of the endangered person's doing. A demand may be made upon him by those threatening him, which he may be unable to meet."

"Well?" said the young man again, and Scanlon noticed that his voice trembled a little.

"Suppose," said the crime specialist, "a wealthy family fell into hard days. Suppose the head of that family, in a moment of weakness, allowed himself to be approached by—well, we'll say—a criminal organization. Let us further suppose that after he had gone into a shady matter pretty

deeply, his position suddenly and legitimately mended, and in consequence he washed his hands of all crooked dealing."

"Go on," said young Campe, and his face was pale as death.

"Again let us suppose," continued Ashton-Kirk, calmly, "that in so leaving the councils of the criminals he took with him something vitally necessary to their success. They demanded it of him; he refused; and, to still further suppose, we'll say that one morning a yacht called the *Conquistador* was blown into ——"

Here the young master of Schwartzberg came to his feet; his eyes gleamed like those of an insane person, and his voice was husky and broken.

"What do you know?" he asked.

"I think," replied Ashton-Kirk, quietly, "I have a fair idea as to what *has* happened in Mexico, and what *is* happening here. And if you care to have me proceed in the matter, and will lend me what assistance I need, there is a good chance that by this time to-morrow you will have left all your fears and worries behind you."

For a moment the young man sat staring; then he reached forward one shaking hand and laid it upon the speaker's arm.

"Sir," said he, "if you can do that, you will have saved me from death or from the mad-house."



Ashton-Kirk placed his hand upon that of Campe. .

"Consider it done then," said he, quietly. "Scanlon has told you, perhaps, that I have some small talent in matters of this sort. And I think," nodding and smiling, "I see a fairly open field before me."

Bat looked impressively at the master of the castle.

"He's had this thing cooking only since the day I first brought him here," said he. "But he's got a fire under it as hot as a lower berth in Hades. And so if he says he'll serve it to-day, all done, believe him. For he's just the kind of a fellow to do it."

"Mr. Ashton-Kirk's first visit here was not all chance then," said Campe.

"Not quite," returned Bat, unblushingly. "You see, along about the time of that visit I had got it fixed fast in my mind that everything was not just what it ought to be around here; and as I didn't think myself man enough for the job, I took a day off and got Kirk."

"Thank you," said Campe. "I felt all along that something of the sort would be the best thing I could do, but I never quite got up the courage to take the step. If there had been myself only to think of," and his glance went from the big man to Ashton-Kirk, "I might have done it. But

there was some one else, and that is what stopped me."

Now, however, that the time for action seemed to have arrived, there was a stain of color in his cheeks, his hand grew steadier, and a look of purpose came into his eyes.

"You spoke of my giving you assistance," said he to the crime specialist. "Give it a name; I am ready."

"Good!" said Ashton-Kirk, satisfaction in his voice. "Then we'll begin at once." He went to a window and looked out into the courtyard where the warm sun flooded the stones. "It's a beautiful day," said he. Then: "You have no car here, Mr. Campe?"

"No, we have no use for one, as we seldom go any distance."

"A run will be a novelty. Take my car. Also my driver, and both Miss Knowles and your aunt."

Campe looked at him questioningly.

"I went over the house some days ago," said Ashton-Kirk, calmly, meeting the look, "and I should like to go over it again—in my own way."

There was a little space of silence; once Scanlon thought the young man was about to refuse. But when he spoke, "Very well," he said.

"As the country round about is a fine one, and you have not done it before, don't be in a hurry

to return," spoke the special detective. "Take plenty of time. And say nothing to the ladies as to why I am here. We don't want to startle them, you know."

"I will say nothing," said young Campe, and then he left the room.

The next half hour was spent by Ashton-Kirk in smoking and talking with Scanlon upon almost every other subject than the matter in hand. Then Campe returned, and with him were Miss Hohenlo and Miss Knowles.

The former was all in a flutter, but the younger woman, so Scanlon noticed, was eager-eyed and watchful.

"She knows that something's doing," observed Bat to himself. "And she's wondering just what it is."

"It's so very kind of you, Mr. Ashton-Kirk, to come again so soon," said Miss Hohenlo, girlishly. "It will do Frederic such a great deal of good to get his mind into some fresh matters. He's been so very downcast of late; and I'm quite sure that interesting himself in Count Hohenlo's life and times will benefit him greatly."

"And it's so kind of you to put your car at our service," said Miss Knowles. "We go out so little since we came to Schwartzberg. Frederic came swooping into the room just now with the news, and we were as delighted as children." Her

eyes went to Scanlon, and then back to the crime specialist. "But," she suggested, "won't you find it very dull here while we are gone?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Ashton-Kirk. "There are many things in which I can interest myself."

"There are some of the Count's journals in the library," said Miss Hohenlo. "Please don't overlook them. His views upon his time are quite charming."

"Quite," said the tall Miss Knowles. "I've read one or two of them—charming, leisurely things, in the most beautiful handwriting."

"The Count knew so many wonderful people," said Miss Hohenlo. "His anecdotes of them are so striking and so characteristic. It was a day when personal quality told in one's favor. Nowadays people are so hopelessly alike."

Ashton-Kirk smiled. "Don't you think they only appear to be so?" said he.

But Miss Hohenlo shook her head.

"No," she said, "I am quite sure that as time goes on, people grow more and more alike. We live in such crowds, you see, there is very little opportunity for us to be different."

"In the Count's day, dress had so much to do with the impression one made," said the special detective. "Many a man has won fame by introducing a new periwig, or had himself talked about

in the coffee houses for months because of an elaboration of the buckles of his shoes."

When the car containing the two women and young Campe rolled through the gateway and the gate closed behind them, Scanlon looked at Ashton-Kirk.

"Well," said he, "where do we begin?"

## CHAPTER XX

### TELLS HOW ASHTON-KIRK POINTED OUT CERTAIN MATTERS OF INTEREST

AS Ashton-Kirk was about to reply to his friend's question, the door opened and Kretz came into the room. He saluted stiffly.

"Herr Campe," said he, "told me to come to you. He said you would speak to me."

"Did he say anything more?"

"He told me to obey your orders."

Ashton-Kirk nodded.

"Good!" said he. "Well, sergeant, I have a bit of work to do about the castle, and Mr. Scanlon is to be my guide."

With not a vestige of expression upon his granite-like face, the sergeant-major again saluted.

"Now," went on Ashton-Kirk, "I expect to be engaged for an hour or more. Keep watch at the gate; if any one approaches—any one, mind you—report to me before you admit him."

Kretz nodded stiffly and departed; and then Ashton-Kirk turned to Scanlon.

"Are your nails still in the door to the vaults?"

"They are," replied Scanlon, proudly. "Up to their heads, and holding like grim death."

"Get a tool of some sort. We'll have to draw them."

With a claw hammer Scanlon pulled the nails without much difficulty. Then the two descended into the regions below. Ashton-Kirk carried an electric torch, which shot a small, searching column of light ahead through the gloom.

"It beats a lamp or a lantern," said Bat, his mind going back to the morning upon which their visit to the cellars was greeted with a volley of shots. "If there are any volatile parties hanging around, they can't get such a fair slam at us."

The rays of the torch danced along the floor, the ceiling, the walls and into corners. Satisfied that there were no prowlers in the vaults, the light ceased its erratic flashing; it now became intent, and fixed itself upon some small spaces for quite long periods of time.

"Again the floor seems to attract him," thought the big man. "Footprints and such."

But the crime specialist seemed annoyed.

"There has been a great deal of tramping up and down by all of us," said he. "Quite a number of very definite impressions are to be found in the dust, but ——" he stopped suddenly, the beam of light held to a place in the floor, fixedly, and his breath drew in with a sharpness that told of a discovery.

"What is it?" asked Bat, anxiously.

"Look!"

The crime specialist pointed to what appeared to be a long streak in the dust upon the vault floor. It was broken here and there by footmarks, but seemed to continue for some distance outside the radius of the light.

"I see it," said Bat, mildly. "But what is it?"

"Here is another just like it," spoke Ashton-Kirk, "and running the same way. And there is still another, but not so heavy, between the other two."

Sure enough, as Bat looked, he saw two deeply marked streaks, with a third not so pronounced between them; they held their relative positions and ran away in the same direction as far as his eye could follow.

"I get the three of them," said Mr. Scanlon. "And once again I ask for the answer."

"It looks," and the glow of the torch began to follow the course of the lines, "as though our friend Alva, from the inn, had been here."

"It's got through," said Bat, tapping his head dolefully. "It's got through at last. These marks were made by the wheels of his chair—two big ones outside, and one small one in the middle." There was a silence as the eyes of the big man followed the spreading rays of the torch. "Alva, you know, promised to drop in some time," con-



tinued Bat. "And I can see that he's a man of his word."

The detective followed the wheel marks; they led directly across the vault to the east wall.

"Right slam into it," spoke Mr. Scanlon from the darkness of a half dozen yards away. "Looks like they had an accident on the line."

But Ashton-Kirk did not hear; he was too intent upon what was before him. Up the wall crept the shaft of light, and about four feet above the floor it rested upon a heavy iron ring.

"Hello," said Scanlon, approaching and staring at the ring with interest. "Was it here that they chained the unhappy captive in the days of old?"

Ashton-Kirk examined the ring keenly; then the rays of the torch flashed over the wall, all about it. As it approached the floor once more he suddenly exclaimed: "Ah!" And down he went on his knees in the dust.

Scanlon, bending forward, saw a place at the edge of a great block of stone where a thick, greenish fluid had apparently oozed through.

"From the river, I guess," he said. "We're pretty close to it, you know."

Ashton-Kirk touched the fluid with a finger tip; then he held out his hand toward his friend.

"Is the odor at all familiar?" he asked.

Scanlon sniffed, gingerly.

"By George!" exclaimed he. "Crude oil."

He stared at the other. "What's it doing here?"

Ashton-Kirk arose to his feet.

"Take hold of the ring," directed he. Bat did so. "Now pull."

As Scanlon put his weight to the pull, he felt something give; to his astonishment the whole mass of stone before him turned smoothly upon an invisible pivot; before him was a dark opening, bricked, and extending apparently for a long distance underground. For a moment or two Bat was too dumbfounded to speak, but at length he thrust his hands deep into his pocket and said:

"Well, I've read about them, and I've heard about them, but this is the first I ever saw." The torch lighted up the passage for some distance, and as the big man peered into it, he went on: "It's all properly mouldy, and it's got the water trickling between the bricks, the damp patches and the fungus, just as Sylvanus Cobb and the others used to write about."

But, underneath the astonishment, his mind had apparently been moving, for he went on in another tone:

"The crude oil was put on the working parts by the fellows at the inn when they found that the stone didn't move smoothly. And now," turning upon Ashton-Kirk, "I am wise to all the interest that's been taken in the river bank of late. This

passage opens somewhere on the bank, and I was the only one that didn't know it."

But Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"I didn't *know* it," said he. "But I *did* suspect. The fact that certain persons gained entrance to the cellar whenever they felt disposed to do so pointed very strongly to the existence of just such a passage as this. That it did not appear in the plan of the castle of which Kretz spoke meant nothing; such things are never shown in plans. My attention was attracted toward the river bank as a possible place for the passage's outlet, because Schwartzberg is near the bank, and it has always been a custom to have such secret ways lead down to the brinks of rivers wherever possible. A river, I suppose, suggested a way of escape."

As the crime specialist ceased speaking, he entered the passage, and Scanlon followed. It was almost circular in shape, and the big man could walk without bending his head.

"Fortunately for the builder, the stone through which the cut was made was soft, as I showed you the other day," said Ashton-Kirk. "If it had been good solid granite, I think Schwartzberg would have been left without its secret way."

At the far end of the tunnel daylight filtered in between some faded tangled growth. A heap of stones, cement clinging to them, lay in the way.

"The tunnel was sealed," said Ashton-Kirk, "and when the criminals laid siege to the castle they broke it open."

Bat Scanlon protruded his head ; in a few moments he drew it back.

"No wonder no one ever got wise to this," said he. "It opens right under that big rock that hangs over the water ; and the water runs directly underneath. They must have had some little time getting the man of the chair in, unless they have a boat."

After they had looked about interestedly for a while, they left the tunnel, and closed the massive stone door. Ashton-Kirk then picked up the wheel tracks with the torch rays, and this time he followed them in the opposite direction.

"Trying to find out what the crippled party was up to," Bat told himself. "Well, it must have been something important, seeing as he went to such a lot of trouble to get here."

Here and there went the special detective, his keen eyes following the wheel marks. Alva, so it seemed, had been rolled to all parts of the vaults, and the track was, to Scanlon's notion, hopelessly tangled. But Ashton-Kirk seemed to see much that was interesting and of consequence ; at length, however, he straightened up, stretched the tightness which the stooping posture had produced out of his back and shoulders, and smiled at

his companion in a way that spoke of much satisfaction.

"Our friends were here quite recently," he said. "In fact, I will venture to say that they were here last night, and, perhaps, upon each of the preceding nights. All the indications speak of acute interest—and failure."

"Failure!" said Scanlon. "In what?"

Ashton-Kirk smiled once more.

"In what they came for," said he. "And—having failed—they will come again."

His interest in the vaults seemed to have exhausted itself; and so he ascended to the first floor with Bat at his heels. After making the door fast, the big man asked:

"Well, where do we give the next look? In the room where the tapestries are?"

"Ah! You have not forgotten the tapestries!" The crime specialist's eyes snapped. "I never saw finer. Campe has a prize in them, indeed."

"The tapestries are fine—for those folks who are strong for them," admitted Bat. "But there are other things in that room that would get me quicker than they would."

"As your interest is so keen," smiled Ashton-Kirk, "we may as well take the tapestry room first. Who knows what interests we may uncover there?"

Scanlon led the way up-stairs and pushed open

the door of the room in question. The sun shone in ; the paintings, the carvings, the tapestry, the rare rugs and furniture showed to wonderful advantage.

"They've got it a step or two ahead of me," admitted Mr. Scanlon, "but, for all that, I'll say it's some room. Class from every angle."

The harp stood, muffled, near a window, and the big man was gratified to see Ashton-Kirk go directly to it and strip off the cover.

"The harp," said Bat, "is an emblem of Erin, and I have nothing against it. But there is something about this particular one that I don't like, for every time I look at it I feel it's got something on me."

Ashton-Kirk examined the instrument with much attention ; there was a pleased look upon his face ; his singular eyes shone with interest ; and now and then he uttered a low exclamation. His fingers ran over the strings. Then, at length, he stepped back and stood nodding and smiling.

"That," said he, "is exceedingly clever. As a matter of fact I don't know when I've encountered anything more ingenious."

"Eh?" said Scanlon, blankly.

But the crime specialist did not seem to hear him, and then, before Bat could ask a question, he had turned away and was glancing interestedly about the room once more.

"There's the sword," said Bat, desirous that this important feature in the doings about Schwartzberg should not be overlooked.

"Ah, yes." The other nodded and glanced at the huge weapon with appraising eyes. "A very powerful arm. The Hohenlo who carried it at Milan was a person capable of giving good service, no doubt."

But after one glance the speaker turned away; evidently it was not the sword he was looking for. His keen eyes, wandering about, went from object to object; then a small, beautifully fashioned desk caught his glance, and he went to it. First one drawer and then another was opened; they held stationery, letters apparently awaiting answers, small bills and other matters. At length Bat, who was absorbed in watching the turning out of the desk, gave an exclamation.

"Hello!" said he. "There we are."

He pointed to some neatly tied packets in the bottom of a drawer.

"They are the things—the rolls of blank paper I saw Miss Knowles looking at in the storage room," said he.

Ashton-Kirk took up one of the packets and untied it. Very carelessly, as Scanlon thought, he ran over the sheets; then he tossed them back in the drawer.

"I think," said the crime specialist, after a mo-

ment, "that we have seen about all we want to see for a space. Inside, that is. But outside there may be one or two little matters which it would be well to pick up." He was about to turn away from the desk ; then pausing, he reopened one of the drawers and took out a tangled mass of strings which lay in the bottom of it. "Put these in your pocket," said he, handing them to Scanlon. "We may need them to tie something together."

Reluctantly Bat left the house with him, and glumly passed through the gate which Kretz held open.

"Of course," said he, to himself, "it's not for me to kick. But it does seem to me that the place to get the good going over is the house. And here we haven't done any more than look at a few corners of it."

It was now considerably past noon ; the sun was warm and the brown hills, with here and there a patch of vivid green, stretched away to the south, the west and the north. To the east the river slipped by smoothly, and toward the river Ashton-Kirk turned his steps. He paused upon an overhanging mass of rock and looked over its edge.

"It's under this, I think, that we found the opening to the secret way."

"Yes," replied Bat.



After studying the situation for a little, the special detective moved on. He held to the river banks for the better part of a mile ; then he paused.

"Just a moment," said he to Scanlon. He left the path and sprang down the bank ; plunging into a tangle of shriveled vines and small trees he disappeared for a few moments, and when he reappeared his face wore a satisfied look.

"Now, then," said he, cheerfully, "we'll take a brisk little walk across country. And at the end of it I may be able to show you something that will surprise you."

So away they went, up-hill and down-hill, and Scanlon noted that their way was taking them in the general direction of the inn.

"Your life in the West," said Ashton-Kirk, after a period of silence, "must have made you acquainted with the various Indian tribes."

"A good many. I've eaten with Pawnees, and hunted with Crows ; I've broke horses with the Cheyennes, when I was a youngster, and I've fought the Sioux and the Apache. Another man and I once put in a season with the Navajos ; and one time again, I had a party of Blackfeet chase me through about a hundred miles of mountain, with never a stop."

"The Navajos are an interesting tribe," said the crime specialist. "Their fabrics and their pottery are picturesque and not without beauty of design

and form." He was silent for another space, and then asked : " You are not acquainted with any of the tribes further south ? "

" None across the border," said Bat.

" Mexico has some races of interesting savages. Her hill people are hardy and independent, and they've never been subdued."

" I've heard of them," replied Bat.

" But ancient Mexico possessed still more noteworthy peoples. Humboldt, Vater and others who have studied their remains have written very interestingly of them. Auahuac was the ancient name of Mexico, and the first known race to occupy the land was the Quinome."

" Some time ago ! " remarked Mr. Scanlon, as they strode along. " Before even friend Columbus had a chance to hang up his name."

" Yes," replied Ashton-Kirk. " But just how long the Quinomes remained it is not known, for a number of wandering tribes seemed to have entered afterward, paused and then took up their way once more. Afterward the Toltecs came from the west—later more tribes, to the number of seven, one of whom was the Aztec."

" I've heard of them," said Scanlon. " Rather queer looking old scouts ; had heads flattened in front, and ——" but he paused, his eyes going to Ashton-Kirk in a curious look. Then he pursed up his mouth, and began to whistle softly.

The crime specialist's head was bent, and he stabbed at the stubble and the brown weeds with his stick; there was an expression upon his face that told of one deep in speculation.

"The Aztecs, as you suggest, were not a physically beautiful people. And their civilization was as deformed as their persons." There was a halt as they breasted a hill; then he proceeded: "It has come down as a sort of tradition that Cortez, when he burned his ships, marched against a people of mild nature and advanced culture. Nothing could be more erroneous. They were a savage race who had conquered their neighbors by superior brutality; their intelligence was inferior to the North American Indian of the same time; it is true that they had a written language, but their character was greatly inferior to that of the Hindoos and other peoples."

"A popular lecture," was Mr. Scanlon's mental observation. "But it seems to me it's going to land somewhere."

"The Aztecs made no roads," said Ashton-Kirk, lifting his head and looking about as though searching for a given spot; "and they had no domestic animals. Both these things speak strongly against them. But the most fearsome thing about them was their religion."

He paused in a place between two small hills; in the ground was a bowl-shaped hollow. Scan-

lon looked at this and at the surroundings with interest.

"Some days ago I had occasion to speak to you of the theory of Gall, the Antwerp empiric, as to the skull and the brain and their effects, one upon the other. It was the custom of the Aztecs to flatten the heads of their children by continued pressure; this resulted, finally, in the altering of their skulls as a people. And who knows what effect this deformity had upon their inclinations. The horrors of their religious observances may, perhaps, be traced to it altogether."

"Like as not," admitted Mr. Scanlon.

The crime specialist kicked away some brush which lay beside a log near by, and in this way he disclosed a huge bundle of something like parchment. With Scanlon's help he unrolled it; it was made up of a number of prepared sheepskins, and to the edges ropes were attached.

"Huh!" said Bat, as he looked at it.

"Suppose we were to throw this over the hollow which you see here; then suppose we were to draw it taut with the ropes after having passed them around stakes—taut and tauter still until the skins will stretch no more." Ashton-Kirk looked at the big man inquiringly. "What should we have?"

"A drum!" cried Bat. "An immense drum!" He returned the look of the other, adding, with

wonder : " And it's a drum we've heard roaring in the night."

" Right," said Ashton-Kirk.

" You knew it was here," said Scanlon.

" Yes. I came upon it after a little search one day while prowling about in the guise of a man with a disobedient liver." He regarded the drumhead in silence for a while, and then went on :

" The Aztecs' places of worship were shaped like pyramids, and were composed of terraces, one above the other. Here their terrible war god, Huitzilopochtli, was propitiated by human sacrifice. A great drum was beaten, notifying all in the city that an offering was to be made. The pinioned victim was thrown face upward across the sacrificial stone, which was green in color and with a humped up place which fitted into the small of his back ; with a blow of a great, keen blade his body was laid open."

The breath caught in the big man's throat.

" No !" said he, his wide open eyes upon the other's face. " No !"

He continued to stare, and, slowly, what he had just heard began to form in his mind.

" The stone," said he, " green, and with a hump on it ! The roaring of a great drum ! A cut down the front !" His hand closed upon Ashton-Kirk's arm. " I've seen and heard things like these, and

I know a man with a flattened skull. But what's the answer?"

"The greater part of the Mexican population is mixed with Indian blood," said the crime specialist. "And one of the most curious studies I know of is the atavistic tendency—that is, the tendency to recur to an ancestral type or deformity. A thing may lie dormant in ten generations of men or animals, and then suddenly assert itself in all its fulness."

"You think, then ——" began Scanlon.

"That the man in the rolling chair, Alva, is a 'throwback'; that his deformed head is an assertion of the old Aztec strain; that if this deformity had anything to do with the fiendish character of the Aztecs, it might naturally be supposed that it has had some effect upon him."

"I think I get you," said Bat Scanlon, slowly. "Check me off, and see if I'm right. This fellow, Alva, is the leader of the party at the inn. He's done for three of the Campe family already, and is reaching for a fourth. The answer to this, so you tell me, is that his Indian ancestors loved blood spilling, and that the thing's broke out in him."

"That's a part of the answer. It was only after failing in something else, remember, that the murder mania took possession of him. And boasting of his Indian ancestry, as Fuller reports, it is not

at all strange that his murderous tendency should find vent in the ancient form."

Bat nodded.

"But why all the frills? Why this?" touching the drumhead with the toe of his shoe. "Why the execution stone?"

"All part of a system for terrorizing Campe. And you've seen how it succeeded. They knew he would understand; through fear of the death which overtook his father, his uncle and his brother, they hoped to bring him to some sort of terms."

"I see," said the big man. He stood in silence for a time, apparently digesting what he'd heard; then he asked, curiously: "But how did you drop to all this? How did you begin? How did you work it out?"

"My starting point," said Ashton-Kirk, "was when you told me the landlord had had the inn only a short time. I knew that if there was a band working on the Campe affair they would have headquarters in the neighborhood; and what you said looked promising."

"That's why you wanted to go there before you tried anything else," said Mr. Scanlon.

The crime specialist nodded.

"As I told you, the atmosphere of the inn struck me unfavorably as soon as I had a chance to feel it. I got the impression that there was an understanding between the people we saw there;

and then it occurred to me that they were fakes ; with the exception of Alva there wasn't a genuine invalid in the lot."

"The man with the cough is a fairly lively person," said Bat.

"The idea of this," said Ashton-Kirk, "was that as invalids they would escape attention ; it would form a reason for their being at the inn ; and so far as Marlowe Furnace and the country round about is concerned, they were successful."

"Count me among the boobs," said Bat. "I didn't fall until they fell on me."

"You recall that we heard the voice of Alva that night, off stage, so to speak, and lifted very high. I at once felt that this was the voice of authority, and I was curious to see him. The Indian who pushed his chair first attracted my attention when they came in. I knew he was not a North American ; this, and the fact that the Campe trouble had its beginning in Mexico, must have started my mind on its course. I had, also, the rolling of the drum and the green stone stored in the back of my memory ; and when I saw the peculiar indications of Alva's skull I felt interested enough to get a less obstructed look."

"Then your knocking those wrappings from off his head wasn't an accident after all."

"A little subterfuge," smiled Ashton-Kirk. "And a moment after seeing it I had the skull



the rolling sound, the green stone and Mexico all revolving in my mind. Before I slept that night I had them associated. When I got you to leave the road next morning and cut across country toward the castle, it was because I saw the wheel marks of Alva's chair leave it at the same place ; and I was curious to see where he had gone the night before."

"And this thing which made you send Fuller to Mexico next day—how did you get that?"

"It was a theory, built up around what I had already seen."

Here the crime specialist looked at his watch.

"Do you know," said he, surprised, "that it's three o'clock, and I shouldn't wonder if the touring party had returned."

They turned and slowly began the tramp over the hills toward Schwartzberg.

The afternoon sun lay warm and red on the western slopes of the hills, and where it fell upon the walls of the castle it had a peculiar effect.

"Even in broad day, Schwartzberg is no easy place for me," said Scanlon, his eyes upon the gray pile.

"How is that?" asked the special detective.

"It must be," said the big man in reply, "that the things that have happened in and about the castle have so colored my feelings toward it that I can see it only in one way."

“ And that is ——

“ A place of peril,” answered Scanlon, soberly.  
“ A place where danger is always waiting to reach out its mit and hand you something when you are not expecting it. As you know, I’m not the kind of a fellow to pick up impressions of this kind ; but Schwartzberg’s put its mark on me deep and strong, and I can’t shake it off.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### SHOWS HOW THE GREAT SWORD SPOKE TO SCANLON

BUT the automobile voyagers had not returned when the two men reached Schwartzberg.

"Campe is taking plenty of time, as per request," observed Mr. Scanlon, as they settled down to wait. "Unless," and he looked at the other, "you think something has happened to him."

But Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"No," said he. "Just at this time I think Campe is perfectly safe from Alva and his crowd. When you first came to me with the story I felt that the matter was one of life and death—that it would not wait an hour. But after studying things hereabouts for a little I saw that in this I had been mistaken. The criminals will not be in a hurry to murder Campe. He is the last of his family, and they want what he knows, or can give, more than they want his life."

It was fully five o'clock, and the dusk was thickening when they heard the heavy braying of

the auto horn outside. A little later the two ladies whisked past the library door, and then Campe entered, dusty, and with an eager look.

"You must have had a good run," said Ashton-Kirk.

"I kept them away as long as I could without attracting their attention. But," and the eager look increased, "what news?"

"We've looked around a bit," said Ashton-Kirk, "both inside and outside; and we saw a number of things which interested us greatly."

Campe stood looking at the speaker for a moment; then he said:

"I can see that you are not ready to tell me the result of your investigation. Very well. But when the time comes," and here his lips twitched a little, "don't delay."

At dinner Miss Knowles was very lovely, and the elder lady was flushed and animated.

"An automobile trip," thought Bat, as he listened to the spinster's chatter, "should be prescribed for the good lady frequently. It's done her good."

"Baron Steuben received no more than his due when Congress granted him lands and honors," she was saying to Ashton-Kirk. "But Count Hohenlo was overlooked disgracefully."

"He had little popular or official recognition," replied the crime specialist. "But he lived in the

hearts of those who knew him, and they wrote him down in their memories as a gallant soldier, a true friend and a lover of freedom."

Then Miss Hohenlo talked of the letters written by the old hero ; of the journals he had kept in court and camp ; of his plans and intentions ; of his adventures. Her eyes were no longer dull ; her plain face was full of spirit ; her gestures, no longer affected, were sharp and stirring. And while she talked Miss Knowles was very quiet, listening with attention. And, as she did so, Mr. Scanlon watched her, speculatively.

"Still on the lookout," mused the big man, "still with her eyes and ears open. I never saw any one stick closer to a job than she does. But what she hopes to get out of the talk of the maiden lady I can't understand."

After dinner, as Miss Hohenlo was passing from the room, Scanlon saw Ashton-Kirk overtake Miss Knowles as she was about to follow. The singular eyes of the crime specialist were fixed upon her face intently, and when he spoke his voice was so low pitched that none but the girl could hear. But whatever it was he said, she turned pale and Bat saw her hands tremble. Then without a word of answer she cast a frightened look about her and disappeared. Ashton-Kirk turned to Campe.

"Perhaps you'd care for a game of billiards,"

said he. Then seeing the young man's surprised look, he added: "I'd be glad to join you myself, but I think I'll have my hands rather full of other things. Your aunt would, I dare say, be delighted."

Campe continued to look at the speaker for a moment, then he said slowly:

"Why, yes, very likely she would. She's very clever with the cue, you know."

Fifteen minutes later, as Ashton-Kirk and Scanlon sat in the library, the big man patiently awaiting the other's pleasure, the click of the balls began to come from the billiard room. Ashton-Kirk stood up.

"Now," said he, and Scanlon followed him into the hall. Quietly they went until they reached the door of the room where the tapestries hung. Here they entered and found Miss Knowles, pale, tall and with the frightened look still in her eyes, standing in the middle of the floor.

Ashton-Kirk closed the door gently, and turning, faced the girl.

"Now," thought Mr. Scanlon, "for a showdown. Here is where the golden Helen is to be brought up with a sharp turn."

"Miss Knowles," spoke the detective, quietly, "may I ask just how long you have known what I am?"

"I thought I knew you when I first saw your

face," answered the girl in a low voice. "But I did not place you. It was not until I had heard your name that I knew you. You had been pointed out to me once at a Departmental reception at Washington."

"I see," said the other. Then with a smile: "You seemed a trifle startled that day when you recognized me."

"I was," replied the girl, "for your appearance at Schwartzberg meant only one thing to me: That all that I had suspected was true—that Frederic was fearfully in danger—and that you had been sent for to trace out his enemies."

"Huh!" said Mr. Scanlon, and Ashton-Kirk glanced at him with a smile.

"I rather thought it was something like that," said the latter gentleman. "But there are a number of other questions I'd like to have you answer, so that there will be no mistake as to your position in the matter. Do you mind my asking them?"

"Why, no," she said.

"On the night that you heard the thunderous noise out among the hills and Mr. Campe madly rushed out to look for his tormentors, how did it come that you stood beside him when he was discovered, wounded?"

The girl looked surprised.

"I had followed—thinking to help him."

"How soon after?"

"A moment or two."

Again Ashton-Kirk looked at Scanlon.

"Between the time you saw Campe without at the gate, and the time you got down-stairs, I think it could have happened."

"It could," replied Mr. Scanlon.

"There are a number of little things which Mr. Scanlon could not understand," said the crime specialist to the girl. "For example, how he came to see you in the hall, apparently looking for some one, on the night he discovered the housebreakers."

"He saw me?" She looked at Scanlon. "When?"

"When you lighted the match. But I heard you before that—talking to the fellow who jumped through the window."

"You heard me talking to——" the girl was amazed, then a sudden thought seemed to come to her, and she stopped. "And then," she said, searching Scanlon's face, "what did I do?"

"You went away," replied the big man. "I heard you go down the hall. But you came back, and it was then you struck the match."

The girl's golden head shook slowly.

"I did not go away and return," she said.



"But I heard ——"

"The first woman you heard was not I!"

It was now Mr. Scanlon's turn to stare.

"Miss Knowles," said he, "I don't want you to think I'm trying to put anything at your door that shouldn't be there. But you expected something to happen that night—I saw it in your face in the afternoon."

The girl did not reply for a moment; she looked at him, steadily.

"I think I know what you mean," she said, at last. "It was when you spoke of Mr. Ashton-Kirk coming that night. I was frightened then, as I was frightened a while ago when I was asked to await him here. I felt sure that if he were expected something was about to happen."

Mr. Scanlon frowned.

"You see," said he, "these are queer times, and when a fellow gets mixed up in such, and sees things that he don't fathom, about the only way open to him is to ask to have them explained."

"I think I can understand that feeling very well," she said. "There are many things for which I too have sought an explanation."

"When you left the room that night of the burglar's visit," said Bat, "and while I was telling Campe and his man what had happened, you did it very quietly."

"I had a reason," said the girl. "I hurried away to find the person whom I'd been seeking when you saw me strike the match."

"Well, were you successful?"

"I was. I saw who opened the gate and liberated your prisoner."

Mr. Scanlon mopped his face, which had grown suddenly heated.

"The wind's changing," said he to the crime specialist. "It's beginning to blow from a new quarter altogether."

But Ashton-Kirk was looking at the girl. "You see how it is?" said he.

"Yes," she replied. "And now that I do, I think it very strange that it did not occur to me before. But I was so full of the thought of helping Mr. Campe, even though he did treat me like a child and refused to confide in me, that I never dreamed any one might suspect me of being one of those who were threatening him."

She turned to Scanlon.

"I thought all the time that you would understand. That is why I hinted at this and that, and called your attention in an indirect way to those things which excited my suspicions.

"And, oh," with a gesture, "there were so many of them. I suspected the people at the inn from the beginning because I once saw a crippled man there who had been a friend of Mr. Campe's father

in Mexico, and who afterward, for some reason, became his enemy. The strange footprints which I'd see of a morning upon the river bank put dread into my heart, and the stealthy figures that I'd see there sometimes of a night, as I looked from my window, filled me with fear. I then began to suspect a traitor in Schwartzberg, and took to searching and prying and listening; and on the night when I found the door to the vault standing open and saw a stranger ascending the stairs, I felt sure of it."

"Was that the night that Mrs. Kretz shut the door, and there was a pistol shot, and you cried out?" asked Bat.

"Yes," replied Miss Knowles. "But," she went on, "I think I had other reasons to be suspicious. As you say, Mr. Scanlon, these are queer times. Things here are odd—strange; like yourself, I do not understand them. What is there about this harp," and she laid her hand upon the instrument, "which attracts me so strongly—for what purpose is it being used other than the melody a player of it could strike from its strings? Take that great blade upon the wall," here she turned her face toward the two-handed sword resting against the strip of tapestry between the windows. "It seems evident enough—there does not look to be anything about it of a secret nature. And yet there is! But I don't know what, though I have tried

to discover many and many times; and I have stolen it away to my room more than once. But it was no use." There was a short silence, then she went on, to Scanlon: "On the night that you followed Mr. Campe and me out along the path, and you told the story of the officer whose sword trailed upon the ground, I felt sure that you had discovered something about this weapon, and were, perhaps, trying to convey it to me secretly. But I saw afterward that this was not so."

"Tell me," said Scanlon, who felt much as if the floor were slipping from under his feet, "what was the idea of the walk on that night?"

"Mr. Campe was depressed; his spirit was sinking; he shook with fear of what was outside. I knew that facing a danger was tonic, while cowering at the mental picture of it was spirit-killing. So I thought it would do him good if he went out, voluntarily, if only for a few moments—no matter what the danger. Of course he did not understand why I wanted him to go; neither did Kretz, who protested very strongly."

Bat looked at the crime specialist, who smiled in an amused sort of way; then he said to the girl:

"You say you took the sword to your room to examine it? How about the harp? Ever take that away with you?"

"I have," replied Miss Knowles. "Some nights

ago I secreted it on the floor above, and when everything was quiet I went there."

"You sat in an alcove behind some curtains," said Bat. "It was dark. The window was open. You picked at the strings of the harp, but made no sound."

"You saw me!" the girl seemed startled.

"I did. What were you doing?"

"What I had seen done more than once before. And I was trying to understand."

Once more Scanlon looked toward Ashton-Kirk, and now that gentleman spoke.

"This interest in Schwartzberg as to the location of the wind of an evening. You noticed it?"

"Yes." The girl's blue eyes went to the speaker, full of interest. "But, like the other things, I could never understand it."

"You saw some one strike the harp strings at night at an open window; was it always the same window?"

"No."

"It depended upon the direction of the wind—the window selected always opened in the direction from which the breeze was blowing."

"Yes."

"Did that not suggest something to you?"

"It did. A signal. But," with a gesture, "it could not have been. There was no sound."

Ashton-Kirk turned to the harp; his long supple fingers ran over the strings, and they responded stirringly. Bat Scanlon leaned toward Miss Knowles.

"I think," said he, "I've got just one more question to ask you, and here it is: What about that package that came the other day—the one with the blank paper in it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" The girl seemed weary with the things which she did not understand. "It was like the other packages that came here. Always blank paper; never a single thing which would lead me to even guess at what they meant."

"When you saw the man Alva in the moonlight," spoke Ashton-Kirk, addressing Scanlon, his fingers still gently plucking at the harp strings, "did you pay particular attention to the hill he had selected?"

"It was a high one," said Bat. "But I think that's all."

"There was another advantage," said the special detective. "There were no intervening trees. From that hilltop to Schwartzberg there is one clear sweep."

He ceased strumming at the harp and his eyes went toward the sword upon the wall. A step or two, and he had it in his hands.

"It brought fortune to the Hohenlos, eh?"

said he, and his eyes seemed dreamy as he gazed at it. "A good blade!" Then the eyes lifted, and he continued: "Those strings, Scanlon, where are they?"

"Here," said the big man, taking the tangled mass from his coat pocket, and offering it to the other.

"Pull one out. That's it. Thanks."

Ashton-Kirk took the proffered string; it was quite long, and trailed upon the floor in a soiled heap. Starting at a point close to the hilt, he began wrapping the string around the sword blade.

The big man watched his friend narrowly as he worked with the string and the sword blade. He felt that in this, queer as the proceeding seemed, there was to be an explanation of some things that had gone before.

"Kirk's the fellow to explain them," he told himself, as he watched. "He's never in a hurry to do it, of course; and maybe that's the reason why he never makes a mistake. But explain them he does; and don't let that get away from you."

Miss Knowles was also intensely interested; she followed the fingers of the special detective with the utmost attention. Carefully Ashton-Kirk wrapped the string about the great blade. Often he paused and inspected what he had done,

as though to make sure that it was what he wanted.

"The romance which might attach to a weapon of this sort," said he, "is endless." Slowly he worked, and carefully. Every moment or two he paused and surveyed what he had done with the nice judgment of a country whittler. "For history, poetry, drama, all tell us that such blades were forged when romance was thick upon every hand. What backs has it hung across in journeys through strange lands? What strong hands have clasped its hilt as the desert's dust showed the cohorts of the infidel? What scaling ladders has it mounted? What castle walls has it topped? What helmets and plates of proof has it rung upon? What captive damsels has it freed? What number of the oppressed and helpless has its hiss and its swing released from tyranny? What stout squires have ridden behind its owner? What brawny lanz-knechts have cheered to see it flash, and have pressed after it into the heat of the fight?"

"And now," continued the crime specialist, "to what base uses has it come. From being the weapon of a hero, it becomes the means of one criminal communicating with another."

"What!" exclaimed Scanlon.

"Look!"

Ashton-Kirk held the sword, hilt up, and with



the flat of it toward them. To the amazement of the big man, he saw lettered in black ink, down the length of the closely wrapped string :

W  
A  
T  
C  
H

S  
C  
A  
N  
L  
O  
N

## CHAPTER XXII

### IN WHICH A MATTER OF MUCH INGENUITY IS CONSIDERED

"HELLO!" said Bat, his eyes almost bulging at the sight. "What the dickens is that?"

For answer the crime specialist unwound the string, drew another from the many in Scanlon's hands, and wrapped it around the blade in turn. Once more he held up the weapon and now they read:

T  
O  
N  
I  
G  
H  
T

"I get it," said the big man, "not all, but some. Those packages sent Miss Hohenlo had nothing at all that was worth looking at *inside*; it was *outside* that their interest lay. In the string."

"I think," said the girl, wonderingly, "I've heard of some such a thing as this before. But it never occurred to me to apply it in this case."

"Alva has a wooden sword the exact shape and dimensions of this," said Ashton-Kirk, tapping the weapon. "When he desired to send a message to his confederate in Schwartzberg he'd wrap a string about the stick and carefully ink his communication, letter after letter, down its length. After this he'd unwind the cord, tie it about a parcel of blank paper and dispatch it. There was nothing about it that would excite suspicion; it held its secret until wrapped around the blade of the sword; then bit by bit the inked portion fell into place, forming the letters, and the writing was read."

"All these strings are messages then," said Scanlon. He frowned perplexedly, and asked: "But why write this way? Why not a letter, and a cipher inside?"

"The letter might, in some way, be opened."

"But it couldn't be read."

"Perhaps not; nevertheless a cipher writing would attract notice, and in the face of such happenings as Schwartzberg has been experiencing, suspicion would be sure to follow."

"That's right," said Bat. Then with a nod at the strings: "Going to read them all?"

"No," said Ashton-Kirk. "It is hardly worth while." He threw the heavy sword upon a table and crossed to the harp one more. "They must be very brief, and little could be gotten from them

at best. They, for the most part, merely appointed a time for the real communications."

"The real ones!"

"Yes; and those were received and answered upon the strings of the harp."

Scanlon gazed at the girl, and then his eyes went wonderingly back to the other. Miss Knowles took an eager forward step.

"How?" she said.

"Upon my first visit," said Ashton-Kirk, "I knew that you were calling my attention urgently to this instrument. And, in consequence, I took especial interest in it. I noted some peculiarities, but I did not form any conclusions until after I'd had Scanlon's report of what he'd witnessed, and had another and specialized examination of its parts a while ago.

"The harp," he went on, glancing at his two hearers, "is not, as a rule, a powerfully made thing. This is especially so in the case of those of this small size. The wood and the metal that go into its construction are light." His keen glance now fixed itself upon Miss Knowles, and he asked: "Do you know whether this instrument has been sent away at any time recently for repairs?"

"It has. Shortly after we came here," she answered. "Something was broken, I understood."

Ashton-Kirk nodded.

"The gilding is much newer in some places

than it is in others," said he. "It's the sign of the repairer of anything that he never goes all over a job with his finishing tool, merely touching up the parts he's worked upon.

"More than likely," he went on, his eyes now upon the harp, "the sending of the instrument away was for a reason altogether different from the one given out. For in those parts where the tinker's hand is plainest, I find that some very important and unusual departures have been made."

"The upper strings are odd," said the girl, eagerly. "I often noticed them. They are of metal."

"And very heavy—of steel, I should say ; and they are strung to an astonishing tension—infininitely higher than the customary strings of the harp. The 'pull' of a number of steel strings of this thickness, and keyed to this pitch, would be too much for a frame of the ordinary sort. It would be pulled asunder. Consequently this one has been powerfully reënforced ; the keys are of a special type, and the sockets in which they turn appear marvelously strong."

"But why all this ?" asked Scanlon, his frowning gaze upon the harp.

"It was found necessary to establish a means of communication between the inside of Schwartzberg and the outside. Letters or written messages would not do ; signal lights might be seen ;

secret meetings were almost impossible, for one could not often steal successfully in and out of a place watched as this one is."

"No," agreed Scanlon, "it couldn't be depended on. And neither could the vaults be used as a meeting place. For the door to them is the most watched thing in the house."

"A way must be had," said Ashton-Kirk, "and one that must be silent and secret. This man, Alva, as Fuller's report tells, is an able physicist, and so the method hit upon of bridging this difficulty must be his." He looked at them as though asking their particular attention. "The eye," said he, "is capable of vision only up to a certain point. It will follow an object going up into the air; then the object will disappear; it is 'out of sight.' However, though the object can't be seen, it is still there, still going upward."

"You've heard the yell of the siren, a thing used upon seagoing ships?" he proceeded. "You've heard its shriek mount and mount, getting higher and higher, and finally you ceased to hear it? But it had not stopped. It was still going on, only it had reached a pitch so high that it was out of ear-shot. It was only when it began to fall and had reached the point where you had lost it, that you began to hear it once more."

Mr. Scanlon drew down one corner of his mouth and blinked a great number of times.

"What do you know about that!" said he.

"Perhaps the world's greatest authority upon sound," Ashton-Kirk went on as he took some notes from his pocketbook, "is the German, Helmholtz. In his book 'On the Sensations of Tone' he says:

"'The simple partial tones contained in a composite mass of musical tones produce peculiar mechanical effects in nature, altogether independent of the human ear and its sensations, and altogether independent of merely theoretical considerations. These effects consequently give a peculiar objective significance to this peculiar method of analyzing vibrational forms.'"

"Too high," objected Mr. Scanlon. "Get 'em lower, and over the plate."

"Then," said Ashton-Kirk, "this master of sound goes on to speak of the phenomenon of sympathetic resonance. He says on this point: 'When, for example, the strings of two violins are in exact unison, and one string is bowed, the other will begin to vibrate.' And in another place: 'Gently touch one of the keys of a pianoforte without striking the string, so as to raise the damper only, and then sing a note of the corresponding pitch, forcibly directing the voice against the strings of the instrument. On ceasing to sing the note will be echoed back from the piano. It is easy to discover that this echo is caused by the string which

is in unison with the note, for directly the hand is removed from the key, and the damper is allowed to fall, the echo ceases.'

"We see, in the case of the siren, and in other things, that some tones are so high that they are not heard. Also we see, by Helmholtz, that when a string keyed to a certain tone is struck, another string, keyed to the same tone, will at once take up the sound, or vibration ——"

Here Miss Knowles interrupted him, eagerly.

"I think I see what you mean," she said. "These unusual strings upon the harp, this great strengthening of the frame, means that it is keyed to this inaudible pitch. That some one outside has an instrument of some sort keyed in unison; and when the harp string is touched, the other vibrated in sympathy."

"And that these vibrations, made in long or short waves, or in groups, much, perhaps, as the telegraph code is made, formed a ready means of communication."

Mr. Scanlon seemed appalled.

"Well," said he, after a short pause, "I think I've absorbed the most of it. But I'm not sure. However, there is one thing I *am* sure of, and that is that I've got a cabinet sized photograph of the party who's got the other instrument. That's what Alva had that night on the hilltop when I saw him sitting in the moonlight. He was exchanging



silent talk with Schwartzberg." Then an idea seemed to strike him, and he frowned again. "There is one thing that I don't quite get. And that is: If these vibrations, or tones, or sounds, whatever you call them, were too high to be heard, how did the receivers of them make them out?"

Ashton-Kirk shook his head.

"As to that," said he, "I am not prepared to say just now. A further search into the thing might bring it out, but I'm not sure. But this I will say: The sense of touch is marvelously sensitive in some people; one every now and then hears some wonderful story with regard to it. Fine, delicate hands may be the answer to your question."

"Another thing," said the girl. "Why was the wind required to always be from the direction of the person sending the vibrations to Schwartzberg? You'll say to carry them. But what of the answer to them? Would not the wind which carried the vibrations from one quarter hold back those sent from the one opposite?"

"Only in part, unless the wind was very strong. And I think if you can remember the nights upon which this means of communication was used, they were fairly calm. The fact that the wind at the time of the signals was always from the direction of the person outside might be explained by

that person's superior knowledge of the medium in use. Having a more perfect understanding of it, he was the more able to read its fainter manifestations."

Here a small clock hurriedly struck the hour of nine. And Ashton-Kirk looked at Scanlon.

"And now," he added, "I think it's time to drop speculation for a space. There is some work ahead of us which is going to be sharp and of the sort that leaves not even a trace of doubt in the mind."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CONCLUSION

ASHTON-KIRK, with Miss Knowles and Scanlon, entered the billiard room a few moments later.

Miss Hohenlo greeted them despairingly.

"Frederic's game is disgraceful," she said. "I never saw him play so badly."

"In that case," laughed Ashton-Kirk, "it will be a charity to relieve you of him. Miss Knowles, I am sure, will take his place with credit."

The girl gave him a quick glance; then she went to the table and took the cue from Campe's hand.

"I don't think I have much of a chance against Miss Hohenlo," smiled she. "She's always been too clever for me."

"My dear," cried the spinster, reproachfully, "you play an excellent game. Indeed, I am never quite at ease with you."

"That maiden lady's pretty able," spoke Scanlon to Ashton-Kirk, a few moments later in the hall; "and in other things besides billiards. She must be on that something's happening, that you

first put Campe on guard over her and now the girl, and yet she goes on as if nothing was to be feared."

"Calmness in the face of danger usually comes from a lack of imagination," said Ashton-Kirk.

"But," protested Scanlon, "you wouldn't say she had any shortcoming like that, would you? I think the way she switched the matter of the northwest wind onto the shoulders of the girl is a good proof that she's all there in that respect. And the way she grabbed, that same night, the fact that the sword was missing, and pieced the fact onto my suspicions of Miss Knowles and the same weapon was rather slick."

Here Campe came out of the billiard room and joined them.

"What now?" he asked.

"I think," said Ashton-Kirk, "the last act of this drama of yours is about to be played."

"Good!" said Campe, his eyes burning. "Whatever it develops—good!"

"Are you armed?"

"I always am—now," answered the young man, sadly. "I haven't taken a step without a firearm in readiness for months."

"And you, Scanlon?"

"All right," replied the big man.

When they reached the lower floor, Ashton-Kirk said to Campe:

"Please call your man. We'll need him."

"Wait!" Mr. Scanlon held out one large protesting hand. "What do you want him to do?"

"We are going into the cellars. I think it best that some one be left to watch the hall hereabouts, and the cellar stairs."

Bat nodded.

"Thought it was something like that," said he. "And that's why I wanted to know. Now I want to say this. Kretz may be all right; then, again, he may not be."

Campe gazed at the speaker astonished.

"I should as soon distrust myself as Kretz," said he. "I've known him for years, and he is in every way worthy of confidence."

"Maybe so," admitted Bat. "Maybe so. But things break the other way sometimes, you know. So let's be sure." He looked at the others inquiringly. "How about that day when we were shot at in the cellar?" said he. "How did the lamp come to smash? It happened, remember, before a shot was fired."

Ashton-Kirk smiled.

"If that's all you have against the sergeant-major," said he, "I think he will do. As it happens, I know just what caused the smash; some one from the darkness struck it. I saw the hand that did it, but not the owner thereof."

Scanlon was silent for a moment; then he said:

"Well, I don't set myself up as a judge. I was wrong in some other matters, so there's no reason why I shouldn't be wrong in this one of Kretz's. So, if *you* think he's O. K. I'm willing to."

"There is only one traitor in Schwartzberg," said young Campe, mournfully.

"Who's that?" asked Scanlon.

"I think you know," replied the young man. "And, as I said to you before, there's no need to mention names." There was a brief silence, then he added: "Something made me suspect that everything was not right. But I was never sure of anything," to Ashton-Kirk, "until the night before your first visit here."

"You saw some one picked up by the search-light while Kretz was firing at a man who was running away," said the crime specialist. "We saw her, too."

"When she returned," said Campe in a low tone, "I asked her why she went, how she got out, and what was her errand. But she couldn't answer. And ever since she has avoided the subject."

"I made one of my customary mistakes that night, too," said Scanlon. "I picked the wrong lady, and I thought you meant her, too." Then to Ashton-Kirk: "Shall I call the sergeant-major in?"

"Yes," replied Ashton-Kirk.

In a few moments the German entered, and he listened, grim and unwinking, to the detective's instructions.

"Here I shall stand," said he, "until you tell me—no more."

"That's enough—if you keep your eyes open." Then to Scanlon Ashton-Kirk said: "Do you think you could find a hatchet?"

"I'll have one in a minute," replied the big man.

He produced one from the storeroom. Ashton-Kirk then went to the outer gate and blew a shrill signal. Almost at once Burgess and his companion appeared out of the darkness, and followed the special detective into the castle. Then the electric torch flashed along the vault steps as the five descended. The door closed and Kretz was heard to shoot the heavy bolts.

"It's rather early to expect anything definite," said the crime specialist. "But you'd better see that your weapons are ready, for all that."

And when they reached the floor of the vault each had a heavy automatic in his hand. Quickly they went through the place and found it empty.

"No one here," said Mr. Scanlon, fingering the grip of his weapon regretfully. Then in another tone he added, to Ashton-Kirk: "But, I say, what makes you think there will be?"

"Some days ago," replied the special detective,

"in my journeying about in the guise of an invalid, I came across a boat hidden along the river bank, and the indications were very strong that it belonged to the people at the inn."

"Well?" asked Scanlon.

"When you told me of your experience with the man who went through Mr. Campe's papers," said Ashton-Kirk, "I thought a paper was the object of the visit. And so it was—but only as a thing that would lead to something else. This latter fact I suspected from the contents of the telegram received by me this morning; and I was convinced of it when we made our search of the vaults a few hours ago. The paper sought was one which held certain directions; the man with the cough found it that night before he leaped through the window. The paper could not have been clear to them; it pointed to something hidden here in the vaults of Schwartzberg; they searched, but without success. At length, perhaps last night, Alva came, as we saw by the wheel tracks of his chair. His superior intelligence at once showed itself, and located what they sought."

Young Campe gave a cry.

"So it was in Schwartzberg, as they said!" he exclaimed, despairingly.

"You never knew it, then?" asked Ashton-Kirk.



"I knew nothing, except that I was threatened with death unless I gave up what I had never seen and knew nothing of. I told them so a hundred times, but they would not believe me."

"You could have given them the run of the place," suggested Ashton-Kirk, "and let them search for themselves."

The jaw of the young man set.

"No," said he. "They asked that, but I refused. You, I think," and he looked at the other steadily, "know why."

"I think I do," said Ashton-Kirk.

"But," spoke Mr. Scanlon, "tell me how you know they located what they were after?"

"In that far corner," said the crime specialist, "there is a heavy flag, set in the floor. Very recently, so I noted to-day, some one has scraped away the cement at its edges. There has been an effort to raise it, but the attempt has failed because of a lack of tools."

"I've got it," said Bat. "When you walked me up along the river this afternoon, that place where you left me to go poking among the tangled old vine was the place where you discovered the boat. And you saw tools in it; and that's what told you they were coming to-night."

"Well done," laughed the detective. "Very well done indeed!"

Then Campe, who had patiently kept himself

from asking questions, seemed unable to contain himself any longer. One query followed another in rapid succession, and in a few moments Ashton-Kirk found himself deep in statements and explanations. The torch had been snapped off; they stood in the darkness of the vaults, talking in low tones.

And when everything had been told him, the young man was silent for a space. Then he said :

“The way you have gone about this is quite wonderful—I would not have believed that such a meagre array of detached facts could be so pieced together, and made into a whole so direct and significant. But even now I do not understand how you made up your mind as to the nature of the thing these men seek.”

“When I read Fuller’s statement, contained in his report, that the former head of the Guatemala police was now that country’s representative at Washington, I wired at once asking information as to the man Evans and the nature of his offenses in Guatemala. The telegram I received this morning,” to Scanlon, “was in answer to that, and it said ——”

Here the voice died away; there was silence for a moment.

“Well,” asked Scanlon, “what did it ——”

“Hush !”

Again there was silence. Then, little by little,

a sound reached the ears of the big man—a faint scraping—and then a murmur.

“They are coming,” said the crime specialist.  
“This way.”

For an instant the torch flashed to show them their way; then, safe in the shadows, they waited. A glimmer of light danced in the darkness, then it flooded a narrow space; the door to the underground passage had been opened; a man stepped into the vault. To the surprise of Scanlon he recognized the soft gentleman.

“Hello!” was Bat’s mental exclamation. “He’s here again, is he? Maybe we’ll play a return engagement; our act went big last time.”

The newcomer looked carefully about and as he was doing so a second man entered. This was the drawn man, Shaw. He turned and helped the Indian servant with the rolling chair, in which lay Alva. After this came Hirst, who had discarded both his crutch and stick, and then the landlord of the inn, with the peppery little doctor carrying some heavy tools.

“What is the time?” asked Alva in his strong voice.

“Almost ten,” replied the soft man.

“We’d better get to work at once,” spoke Alva.  
“Get the bars.”

“Wait,” said the soft man. “I want to have a look at the door.”

The rays of the lantern came creeping toward the five crouching in the shadow. But the edge of the illumination did not quite reach them as the man went by and softly up the step. After a little he returned ; the rays lighted up the inquiring faces of those awaiting him.

"All right," he reported. "It seems to be still nailed fast."

"Now," said Alva, impatiently, "to work. And let us get out of this hole. I can feel the dampness creeping into my very bones."

The watchers saw them cluster about the point indicated by Ashton-Kirk a short time before. The yellow light of the lantern played about them quaveringly ; Alva, with his misshapen head and his burning eyes, sat propped up in his chair, waiting.

Iron chinked against stone ; there came a grinding and a straining as the men threw their weights on the bars ; then followed a panting of breath, muffled exclamations, and a huge slab of stone from the floor leaned against the wall.

"The light !" cried Shaw.

The rays shone down on the place which the flag had covered a few moments before.

"There they are !" came the smothered cry of the soft man.

Shaw snatched at something ; in a moment it was out upon the floor. It was a flat package, wrapped in lead foil and tied with cord. A knife-

blade cut the binding, the foil was torn away, as was layer after layer of oiled paper ; then the rays of the lantern glanced upon the surface of a number of metal plates.

"They are the plates ! It's Joe's work !" The soft man was exultant and waved his arms.

"How many are there ?" asked Alva.

"Four," replied Shaw. "And all in perfect condition."

"In six months," babbled the soft man, "there will be some 'stuff' in circulation in Mexico that will never be detected. 'Stuff,'" and here he laughed almost hysterically, "that'll be better than the genuine. Joe was the workman ; he knew how to go over a plate."

"And he also knew how to wrap one so that the damp wouldn't get a chance to work on it," said Shaw. "Hold the lantern closer."

Under the light the drawn man inspected the plates closely.

"Great work !" said he, at length. "Never saw better." Then he looked at the soft man. "How long did your brother put in on them ?"

"I'm not sure. A good many months, though. And it was all done in this place. Joe worked himself to death over them ; he was sick when old Campe got cold feet, backed out of the job and hurried north. He must have given Joe some kind of a story to get him to hide his work in this

way ; he was a wise old fox, as you know. Anyway, he went back to Mexico ; Joe died before he could get any kind of word to me ; and there we were, up a tree."

"Well, we are safely down again," came the strong voice of the cripple ; "but don't let us wait here. Get the plates together, and we'll be off."

Shaw obeyed ; carefully he placed the plates one upon another, the layers of oiled paper between. He had them all nicely adjusted when they were snatched from his hand, and a voice said quietly :

"Careful now, gentlemen. Don't do anything hasty. There are five guns between you and what you want."

Startled, amazed, snarling, the seven stared at Ashton-Kirk. Faintly they saw the burly form of Scanlon in the shadow, and beside him the master of Schwartzberg and the two detectives ; in the polish of the black automatics which these held there was a silent menace.

Ashton-Kirk nodded to the soft man, and smiled.

"The Guatemala police also admired the work of your brother," said he. "They say they never saw better." Then without turning his head : "Scanlon !"

"Right here," answered the big man, promptly.

"How long do you think it would take you to undo the work of Joe Evans, engraver, upon four plates, counterfeiting the notes of the Mexican Republic?"

"With a hatchet," replied the big man, "about one second to each plate."

The engraved steel clashed upon the floor at his feet.

"I'll take the torch, too," said Bat, "so's to be sure and make a job of it."

"Steady now," said the detective, as his keen eye noted a movement on the part of the criminals. "And you, Mr. Shaw, keep away from that lantern. I understand the sudden extinguishing of lights is a specialty of yours."

The light of the torch fell upon the four steel plates; Mr. Scanlon placed them face up, and with a few sharp cuts from the edge of the hatchet upon each ruined them forever. And then, once more, they clashed upon the floor, this time at the feet of the intruders.

"There they are," observed the big man, lazily. "Seeing that you were at so much trouble to get them I'd hate to see you go without them ——"

"I suppose," said Alva, and his full lips drew back and showed his teeth in a smile, "you will now call the police."

"I hardly think we'll go to that extreme," replied Ashton-Kirk. "The Mexican government

possibly would be interested to know who was guilty of the murder of three members of the Campe family, but we'll hold that in reserve for a while, at least."

"You couldn't prove anything," sneered Alva.

"Don't be too sure of that, Mr. Alva. The mark of your hand is plain in your work, and it would not be at all difficult to tie you up in it." He nodded to the man, quietly. "But," said he, "we'll say nothing about that now. I'm giving you a chance—not for your sake, nor for the sake of any of your friends, of course—but to spare an entirely innocent young man a family scandal."

He pointed to the underground passage.

"Waste no time in going," said he. "And let us see no more of you."

Sullenly the seven, like wild beasts, longing, but not daring to leap upon their captors, turned to the passage. Alva's chair was rolled into it, then the others followed, muttering and with many sidelong glances.

"Good-night," called Scanlon into the tunnel. "Hope you've had a good time."

Then the great stone swung shut and closed them out.

"I don't think you'll ever be bothered by any of those gentlemen again," said Ashton-Kirk, to Campe. "They were interested in the plates, and not at all in you. However," as they as



cended the steps, "I'd have that passage filled in, if I were you, and meant to spend much time at Schwartzberg."

Kretz opened the door at Campe's summons. The entire household seemed gathered in the lower hall about the door.

"The Fräulein Hohenlo," and the grim German motioned toward that lady, "would go down to you. But I would not let her."

"You are not hurt?" asked a voice, and the golden-haired girl came toward young Campe. Her voice was low and trembling, and she moved unsteadily.

"Take care!" cried Ashton-Kirk, sharply. He was not a moment too soon in the warning, for Campe had barely time to leap forward and catch the fainting girl in his arms.

Miss Hohenlo, white, and with a deadened look in her eyes stood looking at Ashton-Kirk.

"He was not injured?" she asked.

"Who?" said he.

"Alva." Then, quietly, for she seemed to understand that all was over, "He is my husband."

"No," replied Ashton-Kirk. "He is safe enough." Then looking at the woman with narrowing eyes, he continued: "He has just about reached the river bank. Will you join him there?"

Dumbly she went down the hall, her hands seeming to grope the way.

"Kretz," said the special detective, "open the door."

The German moved after the woman, and in a few moments they heard the great gate open and close.

"Well," said Mr. Scanlon, with a long breath, "that's all finished! And it seems to me," nodding to Ashton-Kirk, affably, "it's a pretty fair kind of a job."

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