

# THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT

by  
GORDON  
YOUNG



# The Devil's Passport

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Somewhere in the foul depths of the Paris underworld is the headquarters of an international gang whose long tentacles reach across the Atlantic—into high banking circles of New York and diplomatic offices in Washington. At its head is one who calls himself by the sinister name of La Tête de Mort. Those who disobey his commands die.

Somewhere in America is a man named Don Everhard; not his real name, you will understand, but a pseudonym which he adopted because nothing else fitted his suave, steely, direct personality. He lives in devious and mysterious ways, solely because he exists on excitement and the stimulating cocktail of danger.

It is inevitable that the trails of Everhard and La Tête de Mort cross, and having crossed, continue parallel till one ends.

And so it happens in this story, **THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT**, which begins amid exciting circumstances in Washington, continues aboard a transatlantic steamer, and reaches a climax when these two men finally come face to face. The story is told by Gordon Young, in dramatic dialogue that has the staccato breathlessness of machine-gun fire.

**THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT** is a passport to an exciting adventure.

AUTHOR OF:

FIGHTING BLOOD  
RED CLARK O' TULLUCO  
RED CLARK RIDES ALONE

A. L. BURT COMPANY

*Publishers*





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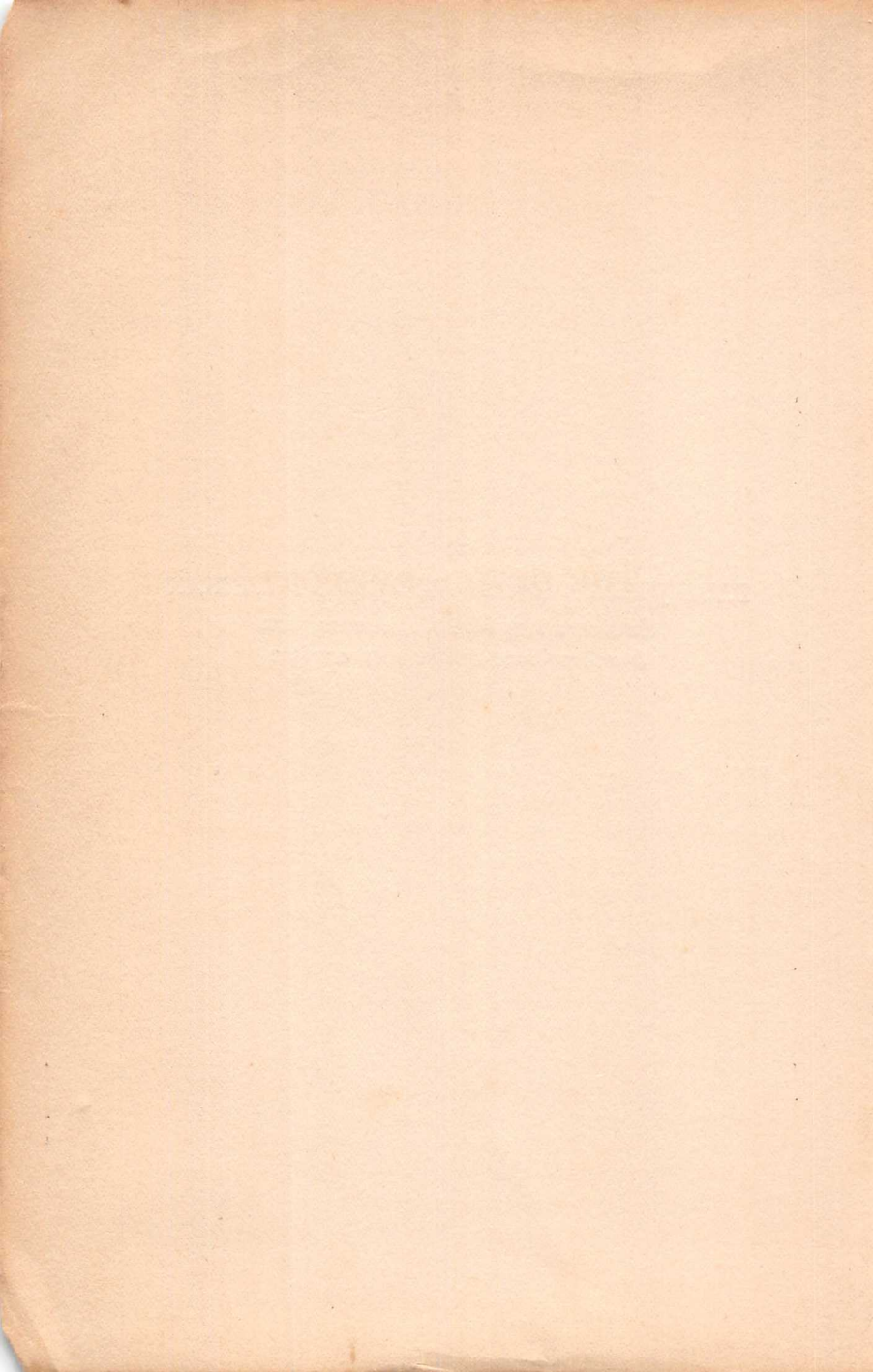
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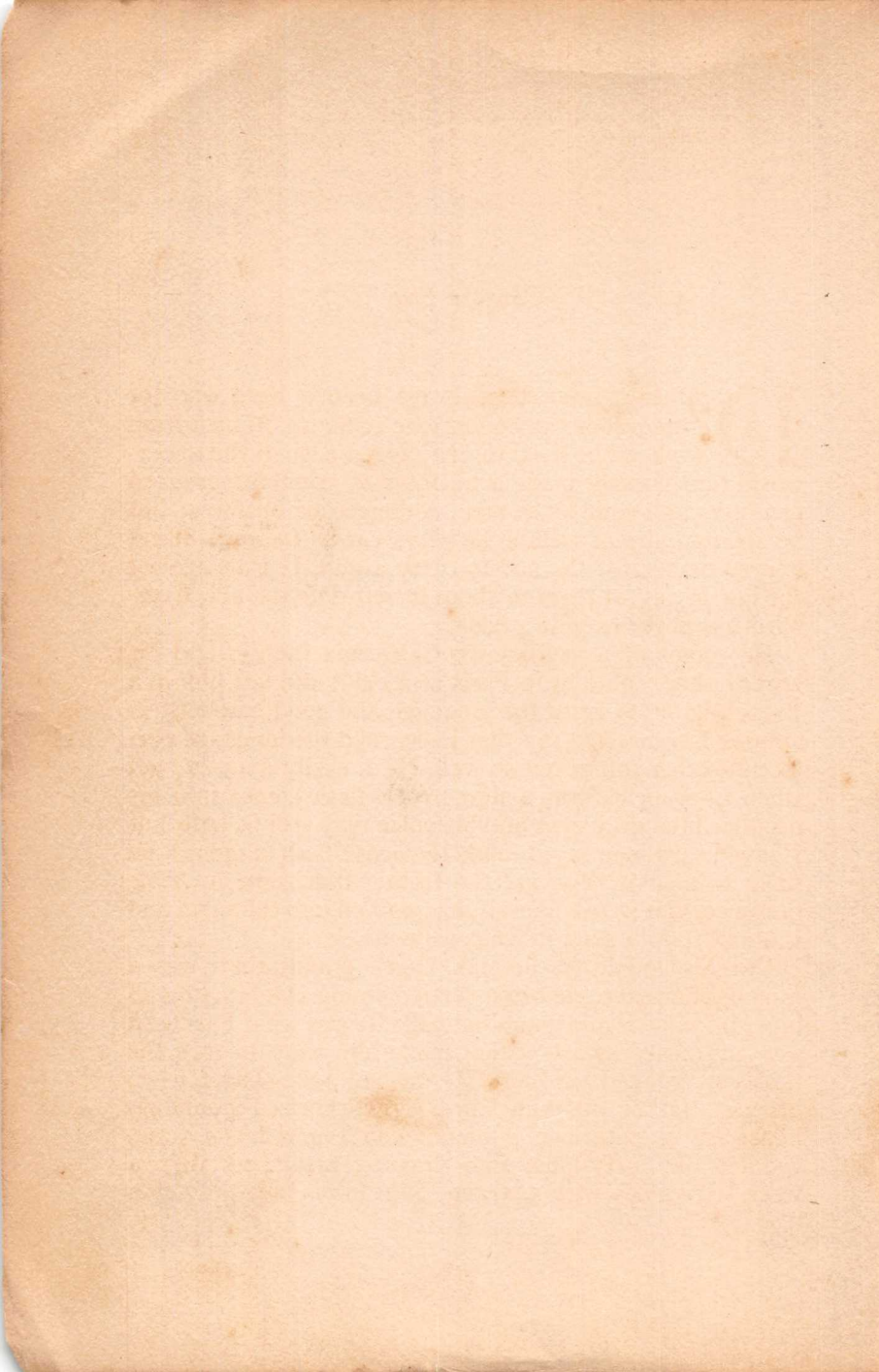
PAUL JORDAN-SMITH AND CARL HAVERLIN

*Beuveurs tres illustres, à vous, non  
à aultres sont dediez mes escriptz*





THE DEVIL'S PASSPORT





**D**ON EVERHARD has always been a hard one for either crooks or honest men to figure. Almost from boyhood he lived on the ragged edge of the underworld and frankly made a business of trimming crooked gamblers and confidence men. A dangerous business; but he shoots quite as well as he plays cards. In some States it may be against the law to carry a gun. It isn't against the law in any of them to shoot in self-defense, and Everhard has never been in prison.

He comes of a well-known California family, and his grandfather took him to Paris as a child and left him in a French home to learn the language and good manners. It amuses Everhard to say that he learned the language perfectly—other things not so well. He is easily amused; yet when he is in earnest a flint-struck flash comes into his peculiar blue-gray eyes and his voice may still be soft, but I have heard men say it made the goose-flesh stand out on them to hear it. You get the feeling that some invisible presence, like Death himself, has walked into the room and is about to take part in what happens.

Old McDonald Richmond, Don's grandfather, was a famous character. He often carried young Don about with him into saloons and gambling-halls. It was what Everhard saw and heard as a boy that made him want to turn the tables on crooked gamblers. He was not quite sixteen when his grandfather was killed in a San Francisco gambling-house by a notorious gunman who taunted the wine-fuddled old forty-niner into drawing first. Less than a week later a boy with a strange glint in his blue-gray eyes

walked into the same gambling-house, taunted the gunman into drawing first, then killed him.

After that young Donald Richmond took the name Everhard as a sort of self-reminder and challenge; and since then his reputation, and the question whether or not he deserves it, have caused disputes in newspapers, in police circles, even in courts.

J. K. James of Washington, D. C., internationally known as the chief of a bureau that is closely hooked up with the Secret Service, married one of Everhard's cousins; but the close friendship between the two men was for a long time kept pretty much of a secret because Don Everhard's reputation has not always been a nice thing to be connected with.

I have known Everhard to say only one untrue thing about himself. He insists that he really doesn't like getting into trouble. Nobody believes that. In Paris, when he was giving me the notes for this story of "La Tête de Mort," he asked me to explain carefully that he tried to keep out of messes. But even as he sat at a little iron table on the sidewalk, sipping Vichy and watching the crowd, I could see the faint bulge of a .45 automatic under the shoulder of his neat dark double-breasted coat, and in his eyes there was still the half-amused gleam of the audacity that had just startled sensation-loving Paris.

## 2

There used to be in Washington, a Colonel Milton P. Gregg. Called "Colonel" because nearly all of his life he had washed the dirty dishes of some political crowd, and by way of a reward had once been on a weak-eyed governor's staff. For years Gregg had been a party snooper, the sort of idle clubman and social figure that calls important people by their first names and bobs about as a fill-in at dinners, playing Washington's game of tittle-tattle, and worse. One morning he sent for J. K. James, hastily made



a rather incoherent confession, then poked a gun at his own breast. James's quick blow deflected the gun, but the bullet struck close to Gregg's heart. He was hurried into a private hospital, and at a word from James the doctors kept the affair quiet.

Everhard, under some other name as usual, happened to be in Washington, and the burly James pounced on him. "See here, Don. You're built and look the devil of a lot like the Colonel. So—"

"And you've got men paid to wear false whiskers. Leave me out."

"The Colonel was smooth-shaven. That ties you up. He'd rather die than meet a stranger who's coming to see him to-night. I've got to know just how that fellow would have talked to him. It can be easily framed. The Colonel lived alone with a Chink. I'll get rid of that Chinaman and put my own there. Your part won't take more than an hour. Maybe I'll learn something. If Gregg had waited till he answered my questions, I don't think I'd have tried to stop him. His racket was blackmail."

"And you say I look like him! Why didn't you kick him out of town long ago?"

"How can us detectives learn anything till somebody confesses—or we read it in the papers, hm?"

"Quite true. But isn't it against the law for crooks to be smarter than cops?"

"You would think of that, wouldn't you?" James laughed and fished a crumpled cigarette from his pocket, reached about haphazardly in his pockets for a match. "As for Gregg—you've lived a lot in Paris. Ever hear of La Tête de Mort?"

"Some."

"Go on." James talked with the cigarette between his lips. It bobbed as if dodging the lighted match. "Tell me things. I'm eager to learn."

"This was in the Paris papers—oh, some three or four years ago. Be news to you, though, of course."



"Yeah," said James, scratching the corner of his mouth, and nodding.

"A dirty little rat used a knife on a street girl. The splatter of it didn't reach the front page until a lawyer with gray hair and lots of medals made a speech to the police and showed them a note, together with some thousands of francs. Note was signed with a seal of skull and cross-bones. Didn't ask him—just told him!—to defend Monsieur l'Apache. He said he wouldn't. And he didn't—being found the next morning in the Seine with his throat cut."

"Precisely." James slapped the table with open palm. "And who the hell knows how many big lawyers, not only in Paris, but in London, Berlin, New York, have got the same kind of kick-in letters . . . with clippings inclosed of the story you've just told? . . . and quietly done as they were told."

"Hm. Plenty of tricky shysters would rejoice to do the job. Why big lawyers?"

"I can ask a harder one than that. Why does this skull-bird so often pick on highly respected lawyers to defend the dirtiest crooks?"

"Then it is a regular game?"

"I'll say! Has a hell of a sense of humor, Mr. Death's Head. Plays jokes on people. Gregg's the latest. It's big. And nobody really knows a damn thing about it."

"Gregg must have."

"I just love to be told things by bright little boys." James grinned, rough and good-natured. "Listen. La Tête de Mort reached out of the dark some few years back and hooked the Colonel. Since then he's been peddling scandal and secrets to an address in Paris. I've already cabled, but I know the answer that's coming. Some old washer-woman or vegetable peddler made a few francs by holding the mail until it was called for—by whom? A taxi-driver, maybe. Or a shop-girl. Who then passed it on to whom? Take a city directory and poke your finger at the

first name you see. Good guess as any. Plant some letters and watch where they go. At best you'll catch somebody that doesn't know what it's all about. My friends in Paris have been through this sort of thing before."

"Then I'd make some new friends. Not all Frenchmen are clever—but all their women are."

"Yeah, we learned that together one night, didn't we?" James gazed reminiscently at his big broad toe, then chuckled. "But about Gregg. He was blackmailed into peddling blackmail. But was well paid. So he didn't fool me when he groaned about what he'd suffered. He didn't begin to suffer until a few days ago. What was done with the stuff he sent, he doesn't know—or says so. I believe him. My guess is that it was shot back to agents in this country, who put on the screws. The Death's Head uses nearly every kind of a crook, big and little. Or anybody else that can be tempted by easy money or scared by threats. So let's get a one-armed man to count on his fingers the people in any city that can't be bought or scared—somehow."

"And he'd have three or four fingers too many," Everhard said musingly.

"Right. But this La Tête thing likes getting fat fish into his net. I can't prove it—yet—but I've got more than a hunch that he's socked his harpoon into even whales. And, Don, there's no way of telling how often he's behind some big tragedy, murder, or suicide. Except that Gregg squealed, we'd never have guessed why he poked himself with a bullet. You'll be interested to know what Gregg was up against. This: 'Buy back your own reports or they will be turned over to J. K. James.' How's that one? The price would have stripped Gregg naked as a fish-worm. No wonder he shot himself. Anybody would at finding he'd been such a sucker."

"And you want to catch this stranger trying to blackmail somebody that looks like Gregg."

"It's worth a try—though it's ninety-nine to a hundred



that the fellow who's coming doesn't know who sent him. He's just been told to come. Hasn't any idea who sent him. Knows he'll be paid and protected—or killed if he stumbles. The answer of all the agents that have been caught here or in Paris, is: 'Somebody tells us what to do. They pay well, but kill if you quit. I don't know who they are and I'm too smart to try to find out.' So you see, Don, there really is something new under the sun."

"Just what?"

"I've just told you. When crooks won't squeal, the police go ga-ga. They've nothing to tie to. And the only reason crooks don't squeal when properly coaxed is because they can't. They don't know where to point the finger. La Tête de Mort and his big shots hide in shadows. The thing started as blackmail. It's outgrown that."

"No crook can be successful unless the police help him," said Everhard. "I know. I always get a lot of help when they think I'm crooked."

"Yes," James groaned wearily, "I've heard that one before. It's the French theory, too. They're so afraid this thing has spies and agents at the Prefecture—and it undoubtedly has—that the Prefect some time ago turned the job over to an old friend of mine to do as he pleased and confide in nobody. I'm about the only one that knows. And I'm not telling nobody, no time. They'd kill him in a minute. That's their game: 'Play with me, at least lay off me, or be killed!'"

"Nothing original about that."

"Oh yes there is," said James, reaching about for another crumpled cigarette and fishing absently for a match. "God knows why, but most crooks respect a dick they can't buy or scare. But this Death's Head, son, feels so damn sure his crimes can't be back-tracked that he shies at nothing. And he likes blood. Likes it, damn him! Also, there's no doubt of it, he's hooked big gamblers—the stock kind, bankers, politicians, society women, all sorts of people who've got secrets to hide. Others who are will-



ing to sell out their friends in this game of Easy Money. But try to touch some of these big babies and see what falls on you. They can pull wires that'll make the Statue of Liberty sock you with her lamp. It's not what you know that counts when you monkey with Big People. It's do their friends want to turn 'em in, step aside, give 'em the works!"

"You read the tabloids, too, don't you?" Everhard suggested.

"And you'd get the rabies if I did what I feel like!"

"Be a detective. Earn big money."

"By God, there's one detective that'll nail La Tête de Mort! That Frenchman I just mentioned. He comes of a family that's hatched great detectives. In their blood! He's worked all over the world. I was with him during the war; that's why I've got a job now. He saved my official neck time after time, and tossed credit to me like I toss pennies to a pencil-peddler. Know his family intimately. They go through with anything."

"Yes, Jim James, I've noticed how you quit just as soon as a job gets tough. Quit eating, sleeping, or speaking to friends."

"Don, you know we give false whiskers and such stuff the big ha-ha-ha in this country, but you ought to see what that family can do. What he can do with his face and false teeth. One day I was using my bad German on a string of prisoners. In a camp, you know. I found one that opened up and told me things. It was the old boy himself. He'd gone in there and played himself as one of 'em. And was spilling it to me. He doesn't want credit; he wants results. And since this Death's-Head thing has become a problem over here, he's told me what they're up against in Paris. You know I have to go across three or four or more times a year. He's trying to put agents into the Death's-Head gangs, and it's tough going. Lots of the agents quit cold on 'im—so many of 'em get murdered. He'll stop at nothing."

"Why doesn't he try to get in, himself?" Everhard inquired, unfavorably.

"He did build his own son up as a clever degenerate criminal. And I could tell you more than that, but I'm under oath not to. God! you've no idea! Well, the Death's Head gave the son a work-out that no half-way honest man could stand. But the boy went through with it. Got in. Got moved up a notch. That is, he was put in charge of some other crooks who didn't know who was over 'em. Then something happened. Nobody knows just what. He probably didn't realize that he was being watched as closely as ever. Anyhow, they tortured and killed him. But he never mentioned his father's name. Made out of iron, that family. God! what I could tell you! But I've told you enough to show why I'd give this right hand to blow La Tête de Mort to hell. That boy was like a brother."

## 3

That night James streaked Everhard's hair with white, made a few light marks on his face with charcoal, and put him into a long-tailed coat. He turned the lights on and off in Gregg's library until he got the effect that suited: not bright enough to show Everhard's slight make-up, not dim enough to make it look as if he were afraid of light.

"I don't have to tell *you*," said James, "to be careful to shoot first. This fellow's coming for a talk. Most likely won't do anything, no matter what you tell him. But Gregg shot himself because he knew somebody would. So watch out. We're playing with dynamite."

James went into the next room, leaving a crack at the door.

Everhard stood up behind a broad library table as the Chinese ushered in the stranger, who was dapper, middle-aged, suave, with a bald place on the front of his head, and had a polka-dotted handkerchief sticking up in his breast pocket.



"Good evening, Colonel. I'm Wilson." He was rather mild and nice about it.

"Yes, Wilson. Sit down."

Wilson glanced about the room and took a chair. He was a little nervous, but seemed to feel that he really had no reason to be. He offered Everhard a cigarette, and seemed surprised at the refusal, but struck a match with elaborate slowness, drew deeply, and sighed.

"Why have they turned on me like this, Wilson? I played the game—but now I'm to be skinned alive."

Everhard pushed across the table a note sealed with skull and cross-bones that had come to Gregg. No crude botch, that seal. A work of art.

"Don't ask me no questions, Colonel." Wilson spoke quickly with a palm out, pushingly. "I don't know. I got my orders. You know what I come for, but I don't."

"Then how can you know I'll be giving you the right amount?"

"Listen, Colonel. You're just to seal up whatever you give me. But you don't have to give *me* nothin'! Suit yourself. I'm not coaxin'. I won't do nothin' but say 'good-by.' That's all."

Everhard opened a drawer and took out what looked like a package of paper money. Wilson showed no eagerness at all, scarcely any interest.

"But, Wilson, you can make a pretty good guess at what's here?"

"I ain't guessin'. I'm a messenger boy. That's all. I just come to see you an' take what you give me."

"I suppose you won't tell me what you mean to do with it?"

"You suppose correct, Colonel!"

"Your day may come when they'll double-cross you, too, Wilson."

"I ain't takin' no chances, Colonel. I do what I'm told."

"Very well, then. Give me a receipt for fifty thousand dollars and I'll give you this package."



Up went the soft hand, palm outward. "Not me! I don't know how much is there."

"Want to count it?"

"Not me! I wouldn't open that package for fifty thousand dollars—not unless there was some way of gettin' to the moon."

"But I may be giving you scraps of paper, Wilson."

"I don't care what you're givin' me. That's your lookout. Mine is to get what you give me. I'm a messenger boy."

"Very well, but write some sort of a receipt."

Wilson took a stubby fountain-pen from his pocket and wrote, "Received from Col. Gregg a package, sealed. J. Wilson."

"Date it," said Everhard.

He did, then pushed the receipt toward the package, making an exchange. He took the package, standing up. "By, Colonel." He had a trace of a swagger, not aggressive; just pleased with himself. He gazed lingeringly at the supposed Colonel's face in turning toward the doorway.

James, burly and hard of face, stood in the doorway. "All right, Wilson! Now talk to me. I'm J. K. James."

Wilson gulped as if trying to swallow a walnut and twisted about in a panicky impulse to run.

"Bolt if you want, Wilson. Men are outside with hands out—to welcome you."

"I don't know nothin'. Not a thing. That's straight. . . . But, oh God! you Colonel! I wouldn't be in your shoes for a million dollars!"

"Yours pinch as tight, Wilson." James had a merciless way of telling things to crooks. "Just suppose—suppose, you understand—newspapers to-morrow morning say the police picked you up at the railroad station with a ticket for Chicago and fifty thousand dollars stuffed loosely in your pockets? And you couldn't explain where you got all that money!"

"Oh, for God's sake, you wouldn't frame me like that!"

"No? Guess again."

"Oh, but to frame me when I ain't done nothin'! I just come—"

"All right, then. Suppose you tell me when, where, and to whom, you are going to give that package."

"I lose both ways!"

"Not quite. You haven't threatened anybody. You're just the messenger boy. All I want is a chance at the man who is going to take this package. Then we'll put him through the hoops and make him lead us on to the next in line. Give us that chance and you can clear out. Go to California, Mexico . . . China."

Wilson shook his head. "Do me no good. They'd get me."

"They won't get you in jail, eh?"

"Since when does the Secret Service frame guys?"

"Ask somebody that knows. I'm not, technically, of the Secret Service. I can cut the corners where those boys have to go clear around the button. Think fast, Wilson. What were you going to do with that package?"

Wilson threw the package on the table and sat down sullenly. "An' if I tell you?" he asked, dry-mouthed.

"You can catch the next train West, after we find you've told the truth."

"I ain't got a chance either way!"

"Lots of people die of old age in California, Wilson."

"But there ain't much I can tell. Honest! I was to go to my hotel an' at eleven-thirty drop it or a letter with a weight tied to it out o' my window. That's all I know, s'help me God!"

"What hotel, what room, which window?"

"Saymore, two thirty-six. Window nearest the door. It's a back room."

James called in the men he had stationed about Gregg's house. He gave a man named Marks (who had much the



same build as Wilson) the package and sent him to the Saymore.

The room overlooked an alley. The alley was dark. When James and his men got there shortly before eleven they couldn't see even bulky objects more than ten or fifteen feet off. They did not care to use flash-lights to look about and get the lay of the land, lest some watcher notice unusual movements. Two men quietly took up the watch on one side of the Saymore. Everhard and James waited on the other side. No one could enter or leave the alley without passing close to the watchers.

On the minute at 11:30 a package dropped from a window of the unlighted Room 236. They waited for some slinking shape to come hurrying along. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen—a half-hour.

"Something's wrong," said James. "No smart guy'll let fifty thousand dollars lie in this alley. They've wised up, somehow."

"Maybe Wilson handed you the wrong tip," Everhard suggested. "After you announced yourself, he knew there was no real money in that package."

"You make enough bad guesses to be a real detective," said James, irritably. "That bird didn't hand me a bum steer. My business is to know when a guy's spillin' beans. All right, boys," he called. "Turn on the light. Get the 'money,' get Marks, and we'll go back and have some more conversation with Wilson."

Flash-lights swept the alley inquiringly. Men moved about, searching.

"What's the matter down there?" Marks called from the unlighted window.

"It's gone!" said some one.

"The devil!" James hurried up. "Can't be. Nobody came into this alley." He swept his flash-light along the rear of the Saymore, and swore.

There was a back door, half open. The window of 236, two floors up, was right in line with this door. Some one



had been waiting and reached out noiselessly, then vanished a good half-hour before. That was all. The trail ended right there.

## 4

They went back to Colonel Gregg's library, where Wilson waited under guard.

"Wilson," said James, sitting on the corner of the table as men grouped about, "let's have another talk."

Everhard, the better not to have his make-up noticed, stood directly behind Wilson's chair.

"You've played square," said James. "But we fumbled."

"He got away!" Wilson was hopeful.

"Right. Clean. We didn't even ripple the water, so he's not wise to the little speech you made us. So as far as you're concerned, you're in the clear. Gregg here'll catch hell for passing you shredded newspaper. I said I'd let you bolt on the first train West. That goes, if you want it. But run, and your friends'll know you've pulled something. And if you try to go back to them, we'll tail you night and day. Make you useless. Make your friends afraid of you. Then they'll give you yours in a hurry. But why not play on our side? Do that, and we'll let you alone. So nobody'll guess. Just ease us a few tips now and then. We'll keep you in the clear. How about it?"

Wilson nodded, not deciding, but hesitating, tempted. There was a crash of glass. Two shots fired rapidly from an automatic came through the broken window. Wilson pitched forward, dead, and Everhard had some of the white powder dusted out of his hair. The phantom-like assassin vanished from before the broken window, instantly.

They ran from the house, searching. Somewhere in the distance could be heard the diminishing sound of a racing automobile. No one caught sight of it. Probably the lights were out. Perhaps it had turned on a side street. Anyhow, it was gone.

James clapped a heavy hand on Everhard's arm. "There you are! That's how fast La Tête de Mort works. Not an hour after the phony package was dropped they sent a killer up here to get Gregg. Saw Wilson. Maybe overheard what I'd just said to him. Nailed him first, then tried for you, thinking you were Gregg. It's a police case now."

The next morning the late editions of the newspapers carried the story how a stranger named J. Wilson had been shot and killed instantly in the library of Colonel Milton P. Gregg, a wealthy and distinguished social figure; and of how the Colonel himself had died a few minutes later at a private hospital, as the result of a bullet fired by the same mysterious assassin.



## *Chapter Two*

### 1

SIX weeks later a telegram reached Everhard in San Francisco. Laura James, the pretty red-headed wife of J.K., loved her notorious cousin without caring a snap whether or not he was as bad as some people said.

SOMETHING TERRIBLE STOP DON PLEASE COME AT ONCE STOP DON'T LET ANY ONE KNOW I SENT FOR YOU STOP JIMMY NEEDS YOU STOP FOR MY SAKE COME STOP IT'S THAT TERRIBLE PARIS THING AGAIN STOP YOU MUST COME STOP YOU WILL WON'T YOU STOP JUST WIRE THAT YOU HAVE BUSINESS THAT IS BRINGING YOU STOP PLEASE DON LAURA

Laura was not a foolishly excitable girl. Everhard knew that James couldn't need him, not in his work—no more than an extra thumb—but he thought perhaps Laura did.

### 2

In Washington, Everhard registered as usual under another name. Twenty minutes later, James, having entered the hotel in a roundabout back way, was in the room. He had lost weight, looked haggard, but his muscular jaw hadn't weakened.

"How the hell did you know I wanted you?" James growled, holding tightly to Everhard's hand.

"Not eating. No sleep. Look like a sore-tailed bear. What's wrong?"

"Huh! On the quiet I'm taking a correspondence course

in detectin'. Looks like a flunk. Takes brains to be a detective."

"Sit down." Everhard pulled forward a chair. James, with a heave of broad foot, pushed it back. He reached in his pocket for a cigarette, found one with the tobacco half sifted out, bit off the end. He changed his mind and threw the cigarette away.

"The Washburn kidnapping?" James growled, questioningly.

"Yes. Been reading about it."

"Here's something you haven't read about it! La Tête de Mort's got Judge Washburn's little girl. And we are helpless. Skull and cross-bones seal. Envelop and paper, good bond in general use. Typed on a standard portable. Letter mailed in New York. There. I've told you as much about what we've got to work on as anybody knows."

"Excepting the amount of the ransom."

"That's the secret. Guess your head off, you'd never name it. By God! in Rome's greatest days Judge Washburn would have been a noble Roman! Listen, Don. You like to hear about guts. They are demanding that a Federal judge decide the Helio Motor case in favor of the defendants. And the defendants are honest men. They've nothing to do with it. It's stock-gamblers, waiting to play the margin. Clean up millions. Our only chance to spot 'em would be after the decision. And here's what Washburn says: Though half the people of America perish, and he and his own family among them, it were better than that criminal terrorism should dictate the decisions of the Federal courts."

James glowered and held up a forefinger. "There is one they can't scare or buy! He's going to withdraw from the case. Says he can't give a fair hearing under the circumstances. That's the same as a refusal. And they'll kill the child. You've read how they killed the chauffeur who was bringing her from school—so he couldn't give a description."



"Needless to ask if the stock-gamblers who might be interested are watched?"

"Watched! We've got men—and women too!—in the same beds with 'em. But that's only half my troubles. Right after the Gregg thing I got a package of money. A couple of years' salary. A skull and cross-bones seal on the inside wrapper. Not a word. Just that. And enough! 'Take our money and lay off—or take the other thing!' No way to return it. I sent it to a children's clinic in New York. 'Donated by M. Tête de Mort, through the courtesy of a Mr. James.' It was the best I could do."

Everhard put out his hand and silently held up two fingers.

James slapped at the fingers, and shook his head. "No. They've got *me* scared!"

"I can't guess that one," said Everhard, skeptical.

"Right after I sent the money to the clinic, a bullet shattered the mirror one night as Laura stood undressing. No clue. Maybe they were just trying to scare me out of the game. I don't know. They did scare me out of the house we rented and into an apartment. I've plead with her, but she won't leave town. You talk to her. Get her to go back to California. Say her mother's dying, say anything. I can't leave her here alone, and I have to be in New York."

"No use," said Everhard. "She comes from the stubborn side of the family; the women are all stubborn."

"I know what you mean. She won't cut and run. But talk to her."

What Laura said when Everhard talked to her alone was: "I'll not go. That's all. I won't. You can stay here and look after me. That's why I wired. There's an apartment just across the hall for rent. And I've paid a deposit on it. So there!"

James came into the room with the hat half sliding off his head. His knees were weak. He staggered. His lips quivered as if words wouldn't come as he stared at them.

Laura threw her arms about his neck, fearful that he was wounded. He pushed her away with rough gentleness.

"The Washburn child . . . wrapped in a blanket. Dead. Beaten to death. Word's just come from New York. A milkman found the body. Not a damned clue!" He stood broodingly, then half turned and shouted, "Loo Sung!"

The Chinese came with running shuffle.

"Throw a clean collar into my bag." James stooped to kiss his wife. "Plane's ordered. I'm leaving for New York—now."

### 3

Nearly all of the facts about the Washburn case were kept out of the papers. The country was in a bad state of nerves anyhow, and if the truth had come out, every little tin-horn blackmailer and terrorist would have had a harvest by scrawling skulls on threatening letters. People would have said, "If a Federal judge can't get protection, what chance have we?" And would have paid up.

Scarcely any of James's associates would believe that the head of Skull and Cross-bones could be in Paris. And for some reason, perhaps because they felt it would be a discreditable reflection on their own ability, nearly all the police detectives pooh-poohed the idea of a great criminal organization.

James telephoned every day, and at the end of a week told his wife with almost triumph in his voice, "We've got something at last."

Three days later Everhard happened to be alone in the room when the James' mail was slipped under the door. He picked it up, glanced idly at the two letters, then felt suspiciously of one. It was addressed to Mrs. James. Everhard opened it, and found he had guessed right. There was the Death's-Head seal. Good bond paper. Good clean typing. A laconic note:



Dear Mrs. James:

Unless your husband lets up on the Washburn case we will give him one of his own to work on. You will be next. Tell him so.

Everhard put the letter into his pocket and said nothing. He began spending even more time, night and day, in James's apartment. Laura tried to quarrel because he would not let her go out for fresh air or shopping, but he stayed exasperatingly good-natured and firm.

It was just about a week after the letter came that James telephoned he would be home by midnight, having some work to do in Washington.

That evening at dinner there was wine on the table. Everhard put a hand over his glass as the Chinese started to pour it. He never drank.

"Since when," he asked, "have you been fooling with bootleggers?"

"Bootleggers!" Laura said. "This may be a wee bit wrong, but some of Jimmy's friends at the embassies—they've the right to it, you know—send over a bottle now and then."

Ten minutes later Laura yawned, "Don't know why I'm so sleepy to-night." She rubbed her eyes, shook her head as if trying to awake, then sighed, and lay back drowsily.

Everhard pushed back his chair and went to her. She moved a little, letting her head fall against him. He shook her. She was out, dead to the world.

He rang the buzzer, watching the pantry doorway. No answer. Going quietly to the kitchen, he looked in. The Chinese sat at a table, his head down on folded arms. An empty water-glass was on the table. Everhard smelt of it. Loo Sung had taken a little wine, too, perhaps for his stomach's sake. Everhard shook him, jerked him, pinched, lifted his eyelids and jabbed a finger almost against an eyeball. But the Chinese was really out, not faking.

He went back to the dinner table, picked up the bottle of wine, looked at it against the light, smelt of it, put it down. He knew nothing of wines, but knew that somebody must have made a good job of this, since Laura, who was finicky about flavors, had not noticed anything wrong.

Twenty minutes later the telephone rang. He went to it, lifted his hand, then the hand dropped. He eyed the phone as if it were a suspicious person, smiled a little, and turned away with a backward glance, saying quietly, "Yes, we've all passed out. So there's nobody here to answer."

He filled his own wine-glass, emptied most of it around a potted fern, and replaced the glass by his plate. He brought Laura in from the couch where he had carried her and put her in the chair at the table, letting her lean forward, cheek down on the cloth. Then he took both automatics from their holsters, slipped them into side coat pockets, and sat down in a chair near a corner. He tried various sprawling positions, but in all of them kept a hand in a side coat pocket.

## 4

There was light tiptoeing in the kitchen, hushed whisperings, then nervous chuckling and louder tones as the men who came in felt more assurance. Everhard eyed them from under nearly closed eyelids. They looked surprisingly young and were sleekly dressed. Their eyes had the glazed stare of men who are half scared, uneasy nearly all the time, and their mouths were crooked from much sneering. One had lumpy cheek-bones, the other was much smaller and thin of face.

"Who's that guy?" said the lumpy-faced one, startled.

"Some bird staked out here to see that we didn't come."

"Oughtn't we do something to him?"

"We come for her. Let's get 'er an' get goin'. That'll be doin' enough—to him."



"But listen. Nobody mentioned this bozo."

"He's out, ain't he? Not worth mentionin'. Take them rings off her an'—"

"Get 'em up!" said Everhard, rising.

They spun about like a pair of jumping-jacks jerked by one wire. Each looked into an automatic, but they got their real warning from the eyes above the weapons. Their arms that had instinctively crooked toward shoulder holsters, dropped. Then in silence both slowly began to raise their hands.

"What's it all about?" Everhard asked.

"W-hy, w-we j-j-just . . . we're burglars!" said Lumpy-face.

"Y-yeah!" said the skinny one.

"You guessed wrong," Everhard explained. "You're not going to jail. You're going to try to escape. Your being hooked up with the Washburn case is all that's needed to get my picture in the paper."

"Washburn case!"

"Oh my God! not that!" said Skinny.

"Listen. Get us straight," Lumpy begged. "We don't know nothin' about the Washburn case. We was in a jam in New York an'—"

"That's out!" Skinny snarled. "Shut your trap!"

"You!" Everhard picked on Skinny. "Step over there to the table. Take a drink. Use a water-glass. To the brim. That or the morgue. And if you open your trap I'll know which you want."

Skinny poured wine into a water-glass, eying Everhard. He sipped suspiciously with one hand in the air, the other holding the glass. He thought about chancing the draw, but drank instead.

The skinny one soon began to blink and sway a little. There was quick-action dope in the wine, and he had put down a double dose. Everhard stepped near him, dropped a gun into his own pocket, jerked one from the fellow's shoulder holster, and gave him a push toward a chair. The

fellow sat down heavily, threw his head back, rubbed at his eyes with a lax wrist, mumbled vaguely, and was still.

"Now Lumpy-face. You've been sent to carry off this drugged girl. Who sent you?"

"G-God! I don't know! That's straight. S'help me!"

"I know you don't. Otherwise you'd sound like a pig in pain. You get orders out of the dark. You're just messenger boys, eh? Where were you taking her? Tell me the truth and you'll have a chance. Lie to me, and you're out—cold and for keeps. Try it and see."

Lumpy was a weak sister. Everhard had spotted that.

"W-we was to take her—I can't tell you! They'll kill me!"

"What do you think I'm going to do if you don't? You didn't take quite enough cocaine for this job. But you won't talk? Suits me."

"I'll . . . I'll talk! We was to take her across the river, out a country road, leave her behind a tree in the grass. Then keep goin'. That's all I know. I . . . I'm tellin' it all."

Everhard walked over to him, jerked his gun from its holster, ran his hands over the fellow's body, then: "Get busy. Tear the clothes off that pal of yours."

"W-what!"

Lumpy undressed the skinny fellow. Everhard tossed him some of Laura's clothes, and watched him sweat and heard stitches rip as he pulled them over the pal's unconscious body. Even silk stockings, new ones. They tore, but it didn't matter. Laura's slippers wouldn't fit the man's feet, so they were left off. A tight-fitting woman's hat was jammed over the drugged man's head.

"What were you planning to say if you met anybody on the way down?" Everhard asked.

"Put 'em in the air and crack their head. All we wanted was one minute's start."

"Good. I'll see that we get it. Anybody at the wheel down there?"



"N-no. Just us two."

"Pick him up and let's go."

Lumpy struggled clumsily, getting the unconscious man onto his shoulder. In the kitchen Everhard snatched some dish-towels in passing. They went the back way, down three flights of stairs, and met no one. A coupé was at the side-street curb. Lumpy staggered out hurriedly. Everhard lifted the lid of the luggage compartment. They crammed the body in.

The car started. Everhard said: "Now take it easy. Traffic cops are smart. Talk nice to 'em and they guess you're hiding something. And they'd like a bottle of it for themselves—and so search the car. Talk hard, and you have bad luck too. Go slow."

Lumpy's foot trembled so that he had to use the gas-lever at the wheel to keep the car running evenly, and his breathing sounded as if he had a fish bone stuck in his throat.

## 5

The road they were on curved in to a wooded district that looked lonely. They met a car now and then, and one or two overtook and passed them.

"Lot of trees out this way. Be sure you get the right one," said Everhard.

"We looked it over to-day. Got a cigar sign on it. Right around a bend here close. Somebody's been startin' a ditch near there. . . . It's right here."

The car slowed down and crept along.

"That's it!" said Lumpy and drove to the side of the road.

The motor was left running. They got out, with Everhard's hand on Lumpy's shoulder as he followed, squeezing by the wheel. He pushed Lumpy before him around behind the tree. It was very dark.

"We was to leave 'er . . . and go," said Lumpy.

They dragged the body out. The dress tore under the

tugging pulls. Everhard made sure that the woman's hat was pulled low and firmly over the unconscious man's face. Lumpy had the nervous strength of one in haste. He carried the man in his arms saggingly and flung the body down in the tall dried grass. It was very dark under the wooded shadows. Lumpy turned with a runner's quickness, pulling against the hand on his arm.

They got into the car and started up with a long speedy grind in second, went into high, and took a sharp curve.

"Slow down," said Everhard. "Throw her into low."

"You're crazy!"

"That's been said before. Do as you're told."

"What the hell?" Lumpy's voice had a bleating whine. He brought the car to a jerky stop. "You won't do that to me after I've played square an'—"

"If you have played square, you can die of old age for all I care—in the pen, though. Into low. Pull off the road. Smash through those bushes."

The car with snapping crackle ran deep into a hazel thicket, and Everhard said: "All right. Come along out."

"Y-you goin' give me the works!"

"Give you nothin'! I'm Scotch. Out you come!"

Everhard left him securely gagged and tied with dish-towels, and went around the bend to where the body had been left. He crouched in the shadows across the road, getting well down behind a bush in the grass. Cars very seldom passed.

Everhard waited, patiently, now and then cautiously changing position. An hour passed. Everhard rubbed a cramped knee and stretched his legs, then squatted, squatted, ready to wait another hour—or till sunrise.

He saw headlights glancing far up the road. A car approached slowly, as when a driver looks carefully for an unfamiliar landmark. The car was barely creeping along as it drew near, and there was the side sweep of a flash-light. The flash-light struck and paused at the cigar ad



on the tree, then the beam reached toward the back of the tree and moved on back away from the road.

The car was a low-slung long-hooded roadster. It stopped under the tree. The lights went off. A man got out. The engine idled as he raised the hood, flashing the light into it as if looking for motor trouble. The light had crossed the seat of the roadster and Everhard could see that the man had come alone. He did not seem in the least hurried.

The man moved around behind the tree with the flash-light on the ground. Everhard thought that he would return and open the baggage compartment before he brought the body, and so hesitated to cross the road. Then he realized that the man had picked up the body and was going away from the car, tramping through the grass. There was a soft thud as if a sack of rubbish had been dropped, and a moment later the scrape of a shovel, and the soft sound of loose dirt.

What the fellow did with the shovel when he had finished, Everhard did not know. Perhaps simply pitched it away into the bushes. He came toward the car, unhurriedly, just like an honest laborer, glad that a dirty job was over.

"What the hell?" he muttered, noticing that the engine was silent, and stopped in his tracks, momentarily suspicious as an animal is suspicious of what is strange. His flash-light played over the car. He stooped, and shot the light under the car, looking for feet. But Everhard was crouched on the running-board. "Died on me," the fellow mumbled reassuringly. His voice was husky, as if he had a sore throat. He let down the hood of the engine, got in from the right side, squeezed in behind the wheel, switched on the headlight, and stepped on the starter. There was just a dead whir. The engine had not died. Everhard had shut it off. The fellow grumbled again and turned on the switchboard light. He saw that the engine

had been switched off and stiffened, not moving. Slowly, cautiously, he turned his head.

"Keep 'em on the wheel," said Everhard.

"Say . . . look here . . . Hell . . . How . . . Who . . ."

A bad one, this fellow. Cold as steel. He wasn't tall, but had a big man's broad shoulders. Good clothes, better than good, and tailored to glove his odd body. Diamonds glittered on thick, short fingers.

He straightened slowly, drew a deep breath, said, "Whew!" then spoke confidentially, as when one surrenders, knowing what's best. "Listen, brother. I don't know how you guessed, but that mail-sack I just cached—you're in on it. An' I'm out. That's the way this game works. I'll dig it up for you. Then you can take it and do the worrying."

"Not a bad stall for one that you had to think up fast," said Everhard. "But this isn't what you think. I've got bad news for you. Ever hear of a little decoration called the double cross? Dead men wear it."

"*Me*—on the spot!"

"Why not?"

"After all I've done!"

"Maybe they want what you've done kept a secret."

"Holy Christ! *Me*!"

"Maybe I'll get mine next," said Everhard. "But just now it's your turn. That's the hell of working for men that keep behind curtains. We can't strike back. Have to do as told. All right, come on out of there. I don't want to mess up the car."

"Holy God! can't you give me a break? Nobody'll know. I'll duck."

"Not a chance. Unless you can put me on to who the hell it is that gives us orders. I'd like to know."

"You're a dick," said the fellow huskily, all eager, and cursed.

"Yes? You're wonderful, you are! A detective would have let you beat that woman's head in and bury her,



wouldn't he? No wonder they want you out of the way. Anybody dumb as that."

A long pause. The fellow swallowed hard. "You win," he grumbled. "But hell! you can't carry a full-grown woman about an' hide her places."

"Not like a child—no," Everhard agreed.

"What you mean?"

"Just what you think."

"Ow! Then they told you." He wet his thick lips with a dry tongue, making the sounds of a man awakening with a bad taste in his mouth. He swore softly.

"How'd the Death's Head come to take an interest in you, anyhow?" Everhard asked, not unfriendly.

"I was in jail—for a sort of fight."

"With a woman?"

"Oh, I killed 'er all right. Police nailed me. I alibied like hell, but it wasn't so good. They rode me hard. Didn't let me sleep for a week. But I stuck. Then damned if they didn't say, 'Sorry, Pete; but we thought we had you dead to rights. But a nigger done it. A tip's just come in. We've got the goods on 'im!' Turned me loose. And the nigger went to the hot seat. Then I got me a letter, and money in it. It said for me to show some gratitude and play the game. I burned it, like I was told. Since then I've kept on doin' what I was told. No matter what. Now on the spot—me!"

"You've made money. Had work you liked. Nice easy life. They knew a man who'd beat a woman to death would enjoy the sort of things they wanted done. Come out of that car."

"You goin' to kill me?"

"No, unless you ask for it. I'll give you a break. Back out of there, with your fingers in your ears."

He came.

Everhard stood behind him with one hand on his collar. "Drop your arms." They dropped, and Everhard with quick zigzag jerks pulled the coat down off the fellow's

shoulders, half off him, then said, "Now lift your arms, high as you can." The man could move them up only at the elbows. "Hold 'em there."

Everhard took away the man's gun and tossed it on to the seat. He reached in, groping backward, and took up the flash-light that lay on the seat, stuck it into a hip pocket, then, from behind, searched the man's trouser pockets, getting the key-purse. He pushed his prisoner around to the back of the roadster. The luggage compartment was not locked. Everhard shook off the man's coat and made him climb in and lower the door on himself.

Then Everhard locked it, took up the coat, shook off the dust, and sitting in the car examined, under the switch-board light, the contents of the pockets. He found letters, one addressed and ready for mailing to J. K. James. Others, three or four, from silly women, addressed to Mr. Peter Tomas, 180 Pullic Street, New York City. Among the stuff taken from the fellow was a .38 automatic, a heavy black-jack supple as a snake, a small manicure set, an address book, and some chewing-gum. The roadster had Pennsylvania license plates, with New York's under the seat. Cigars were in the door pockets, and road maps.

Everhard started up the car, turning around. He had not forgotten Lumpy-face, but didn't want to be bothered with small fry.

## 6

Everhard got back to Washington about midnight. He stopped at a drug-store and telephoned James's apartment. James answered. Everhard very quietly hung up, saying nothing. He had learned what he wanted to know. Fifteen minutes later he entered his own apartment, quickly washed up, changed his clothes, and crossed the hall.

James opened the door, gave him one searching look from head to feet, and said: "You're a liar! Walk in here



cool, clean and neat—with all the cream carefully licked off your whiskers. What the hell happened?"

"How's Laura?"

"The doctor brought her around, but she's blank on this." James waved a hand. "Men's clothes. Her dresses scattered. Loo Sung out, cold. And you gone. Can't you talk?"

"I'll talk all right. I've got news. But remember, I'm out of the picture. I don't know how you'll work it, and I don't care. My name's not to be mentioned and I don't show in court. That a bargain?"

James eyed him. "You've played hell somehow. But you wouldn't put me in a jam. So tell it all."

"This is more than a guess," said Everhard. "The man that killed the Washburn child is Pete Tomas, one-eighty Pullic Street, New York."

"You know it? It's your own idea—not something you've heard?"

"Mine."

James surged toward the telephone. Everhard caught at his shoulder.

"Out 'o the way, little boy," said James. "Papa's busy. I want long distance."

"Save the toll. Pete's down in a car, alone. Waiting for you."

"Dead, then."

"No. Locked in the back of a roadster. Here are the keys. Everything else I took off him is on the floor of the car. Except this letter. It's for you. Take the stamp off carefully and you can use it again."

James glanced at him questioningly. Everhard's face was not easy to read.

"Joking, aren't you?" James, asked sarcastically, and took the letter.

James cut the envelop carefully, took out the letter with as much gingerliness as if the paper would melt should his fingerprints get on it, and read with deepening of grim

look. He held out the letter, holding it carefully by the corners.

Dear Mr. James:

Your wife is safe and will be given every courtesy if you lay off the Washburn case.

Everhard nodded. Their eyes met.

James took a deep breath. "They were after her? I half-way guessed it when I saw these men's clothes." He folded the letter, replaced it in the envelop, put the envelop into an inside pocket. "Can't you see I'm listening?"

"What if they'd got her? Then you . . . this letter . . . ?"

"Do you really need to ask that?" said James quietly, with tightening of heavy jaws.

"Don't you ask lots of things when you know the answer? The man that wore Laura's clothes . . . I don't know whether Pete Tomas beat him to death or not; but if not, he was buried alive. And Tomas still thinks it was Laura."

James growled and lifted his fists, swore, dropped his head, shook it. He turned away, as if dizzy; then spun about. "And you won't let your name appear in this? Why do you want to be a damn-fool violet? You've got no more modesty than a hoot-owl. And you're not afraid of all the Death's Heads this side of hell. Come clean. What's up? I can fix it no matter how many you shot. Get you medals for it. Say something!"

Everhard looked at him. Then: "I'm going to Paris. That is, if you'll put me through as a big crook that's on the run, and if you think your friend who's making the fight would be willing for me to have a try at it."

James, not wanting to show what he felt, began to flap his pockets, searchingly. "Why the hell don't you smoke? Then all I'd have to do would be say, 'Give me a cigarette,' instead of . . ." He found a cigarette, but snapped it be-



tween his fingers. "Don, I'll make you out the biggest crook that ever talked to a lawyer. God! but I'm shaky to-night! And listen. If by any chance we can hook this Pete Tomas up with a certain wall-eyed broker who ought to be hanged because he's got a mug the noose was invented to frame, then we'll get somewhere. He's big, too big to monkey with unless you wear mittens. But—God help me if I pull a boner!—I'm sending a troupe of safe-crackers against his private tin can. . . . But I've got to get to that Pete Tomas."

James snatched up his hat. "Aren't you coming?"

"No. I've just told you why I can't show in the picture."

"You're right. I'm goofy to-night. Go in and kiss my wife for me. That's the biggest favor I can grant any man—damn you!" He laughed and slammed the door.

## Chapter Three

### 1

ANY one interested in how James fixed it so that Everhard's name did not appear can go to the newspaper files. Lumpy-face was eager for a life-time security in prison and pleaded guilty to murders that he perhaps had nothing to do with. Peter Tomas refused to confess even after his house at 180 Pullic Street had been searched and a school pin belonging to the Washburn child had been found. Some big lawyers suddenly took an interest in his case, and powwowing alienists were all set to swear that a man who had tried like hell to hide his crimes did not know right from wrong; but Tomas hanged himself in his cell. It was suspected that a guard had smuggled in the rope and told Tomas to use it, probably giving him a little help.

It was only a few days after Tomas was caught that the Wattison story broke in New York.

Wattison was a broker with vast offices. A high-flyer in the underworld, or at least the night world. A shady bird, but liked bright lights. Police captains called him Tom. So did half the after-dark blondes of Broadway. He was lean, with narrow pinched eyes, a twisted scar of a mouth, and a low jerky voice. Half the little finger of his left hand was missing. He was never drunk. He did not use dope. He was cold as most dead men. The night-birds eyed him mystified, for he wasn't the type. He wasted money like a sucker, but kept his mouth shut. Yet he seemed to dread being alone.

One morning about 4:30 A.M. a pop-eyed pale-faced broker's clerk—without tie or collar, which showed he



had started off in a forgetful hurry—ended his zigzag taxi trail from one joy-joint to another, and came upon Wattison at what is called the cuffs' table of an upstairs party place where things were going on that you don't read about.

A bouncer had a hand on the clerk's elbow, ready to throw him out unless he made good his story that he had bad news Wattison must hear.

Wattison twisted his ropy neck in a sidewise stare, saw who it was, pushed the bad baby off his knee, and stood up. "Well, Carter?"

"They gagged our night watchman . . . hocused the wires . . . and your private safe, sir! That's all they touched. Bill worked out of the ropes, telephoned the police, then telephoned all of us of the office force that he could get. He said you had to know, sir. Said you'd said if ever anything like that was tried, you were to be found and told, day or night, sir."

"My own safe, eh?"

"Bill says they cleaned it like a pocket inside out, sir."

Wattison didn't bat an eye. He stood still and stared vaguely at a pair of diaperless bad babies that were frisking in a confetti snow-storm; but he didn't see them. He kept on looking blankly at the same spot after they had moved away. He shook himself—or maybe shivered—but he didn't say a word. He drew a roll of money and tossed some bills at the table, waved the collarless clerk aside when he started to follow, left the joint without opening his mouth, and disappeared completely.

2

"Don, my boy," said James, patting some stuff that had come from Wattison's safe, "I've got the one essential fundamental characteristic that makes a great detective!"

"Bluff, hm?"

"No. Luck! Give me luck. Other dicks can have the brains. All his records were on flimsy paper. Not much to

'em. Kept most of it in his head. But if he'd had a ten-minutes tip that we were coming—even if we'd been in the outer office—he'd have burned this stuff in his nice little marble fireplace, and whacked the keys of that portable typewriter with a file. Then where'd we have been?"

"But what did your safe-crackers get out of it?"

"Get! They got bales of money. So much they thought it was counterfeit."

"And now they've got that on you. Use you for a cushion when they fall."

"*Me?* Listen, Don. Didn't I go to Sunday-school as a boy? Being mostly led by the ear, though! Yet I learned to save myself from evil influences. My safe-crackers know they were handed something on a gold platter. But son, get up close to Papa's knee and listen. I ribbed it so they think the police put 'em on to it. And, being square guys, they sent a certain somebody his cut. He'll wonder what the hell—but keep it!"

"How'd you spot Wattison?"

"Hate to tell you. Took so little brains. We knew the Washburn thing was a stock gamble. Knew also it had to be somebody that took orders from Paris. We went over all the brokers that had a Paris hook-up. A lot of 'em. Wattison was one. He looked as O.K. as the others. I visited 'em all. But Wattison roamed the joy-joints of jazz-town—and never let himself go. Always cold. Sober. I said to myself, 'That bird ain't happy. He's scared stiff. Let's have a look-see.' I got to his cables. Code. Found some of them came from persons that couldn't be checked. I hollered to my Monsieur X. of Paris. He said Wattison's connections in Paris were certainly open to suspicion. So I called on Wattison. Said I wanted him to help me spot the gamblers that had tried to break Judge Washburn. He said he would, and wished me luck. Nice of him, wasn't it? But he was smart. He knew my eye was on him. That letter telling Laura to tell me to lay off came right after my visit to him. All good detectives can count up to ten—



at least on their fingers. So I counted up all I had on him, and took a chance.

"Doubt if we'll catch him, though he's known by sight to a lot of stools that would turn in Christ for thirty cents, same as Judas. First joint's gone off his little finger. But he's smart. No doubt he has a big cache somewhere, and is still richer than most of the world's honest men. But he can't go far. When once you fail the crowd presided over by M. La Tête de Mort of gay Paree, you're done, through, all in and out—a dead one, or soon will be! And you ain't seen nothin' yet. Oh teacher, look what Jimmy's found!" He picked up a small box and laid it before Everhard. "See what I'm going to have made into a medal to wear on my undershirt."

It was the Death's-Head seal. In the same box was a finger ring with a skull and cross-bones design.

James chuckled. "You and me can go in for blackmail now. We've got the sucker list and the do-hickus. Even the wax. Too damn bad there wasn't a list of the tried-and-true agents that we could use."

"But he couldn't have hid this seal or burned it while you were kicking on his door."

"Bright boy! Children *do* ask the queerest questions! He couldn't have shied it out of his tenth-story window? If ever found, who'd have pinned it on him?" James picked up the finger ring. "This would have been harder to ditch. Take a look."

The ring was of platinum. A death's head was framed by cross-bones that formed a triangle on each side and merged into a band. A thing of macabre art, but, like the seal, real art, beautifully wrought. The little platinum skull had empty eye-sockets, a hollow nose, and a lipless mouth filled with teeth.

"Look!" James pried up the skull's chin. The death's face lifted like a lid and disclosed a tiny miniature. "That's Wattison's mug. You're great on art—or make us lowbrows think you are. What o' this?"

"I've never seen such eyes. They look alive and—"

"Right. The artist looked inside of Wattison and painted the god-awful truth. It's frightful. Unlike him, yet like you know he is."

"What does the ring mean?"

"There you go. Tryin' to show me up. I don't know. But I'll guess with you. I'd say the picture serves like a passport snap-shot among some people. I've shown these things—the ring and the seal—to museum sharks. Told 'em nothing. Just listened. They went goofy. Said it was big-time stuff. Said no known miniaturist, dead, alive, or yet to be born, could touch this bird. Get me? Real art! And I'm wondering like hell about something. Can you guess?"

"Easy!"

"All right. Tell it to me. I want to hear how my thoughts sound in somebody else's mouth."

"This Death's Head is a crime thing. As bad as you ever heard of."

James nodded approval.

"So you're pop-eyed as to why an artist, a real genius in art, is mixed up with blackmail, terrorism, murder," Everhard went on. "So?"

"You've told it. No wonder nobody can play poker with you. Damn mind-reader! Get this. You've already got it, but I'm going to make my little speech anyhow. The mysterious gink who's the real head of this La Tête de Mort appreciates the genius of his artist. Otherwise any botch of a seal, any do-dad of a ring, any two-bit snap-shot, would serve as well. I get the feeling and get it strong—" James studied the miniature—"that the old murder-boy had a devil's insolence and humor to make Wattison keep, and sometimes show, a picture like this of himself. The more you look at it, the more it looks like him. He knows what's inside of a man. And when you work up to where they give you a ring, I want to see it. Some things about you I'd like to know. You're the sort of egg that's suitable



for a bad first night, Don; yet dogs and children like you.

"Now listen some more. The story I'm framing on you is going to break in about three weeks at San Francisco. It'll make Al Capone look like a piker. All the bad girls in Paris'll have their arms out, welcomingly. And get this—keep it, too! When you get to Paris, don't try to guess which are your friends and which are Death's-Headers. Both sides'll be trying you out, watching every move. On top of that, the police themselves will be damned suspicious and keep an eye on you. Remember too, there's probably more *agents de police* taking orders from La Tête de Mort than are taking 'em from my friend Monsieur X., who is going to take you to pieces and inspect head, heart, and guts to see what you're made of before he'll back you up in this game. He's cautious and he's thorough. He'll pull stunts on you and have you watched night and day. Looking for your weak spots. He's a better detective than I am, so he'll probably find some. And if the Death's-Headers get a glimmer of suspicion that you are trying to horn in on them, your future address will be 'Hell.' One word more. The wisest of all. Look out for the ladies. Frenchwomen can do things to you that the Hollywood dames are too bashful to try."

## 3

You may or may not recall the sensational confessions of one Captain Bill Broad from a San Francisco jail, where, with a bad lookout before him, he said he was going to come clean and spill it all. He was a hard-boiled rum-runner, had been in the game for years; but he got religion or something and said he and a dozen others like him had never done anything but take orders from Don Everhard, who was, and long had been, secretly in control of the hijackers of the high seas. A lot of water-front roustabouts—most of them merely wanting their names in the paper—said the same thing. Head-lines blazed all over the coun-

try. The sort of fiction-writers that are called correspondents soon made out that Everhard was a ruthless pirate, ruling the Pacific from Seattle to San Diego.

An old ex-chief of police of San Francisco called it all a lot of hooey; said Everhard had raised hell-a-plenty there and elsewhere, giving big-shot gamblers the jimjams and confidence men sad stories to tell. "But nobody can make me believe," said the old ex-chief, "that Everhard ever took a dime out of traffic in booze, dope, or women."

Such papers as carried the ex-chief's statement gave it a stick in an obscure corner. Reporters everywhere searched for Everhard; but he, with what appeared to be furtive guiltiness, vanished. So everybody said Bill Broad's story must have a lot of truth in it, since Everhard had been scared into hiding.

## 4

It was at this time, the latter part of September, that the *Trivilia*, a slow cabin boat, sailed from New York. Shortly before midnight a passenger wearing gray tweeds and walking with a decided limp came on board. He was down on the purser's list as Robert Burnett, and went at once to his state-room without at all noticing a dark-eyed girl who stood alone in the shadows near the gangway and scrutinized every man that came on the ship.

In his state-room Mr. Burnett found a big basket of fruit and a thick bundle of books and magazines. The gift card on the fruit basket said, "Hope you get seasick. J.K.J." Everhard took an apple, bit into it, sat down, and, holding the apple in one hand, removed his shoe. He rubbed the sole of his foot, put the apple aside, and fished about in the shoe for a dried pea. He carefully split the pea in two and tossed half of it away.

He undressed slowly, eating another apple, and opened the suitcase and tossed pajamas toward the bed, then examined half idly the two extra passports in the flap of the suitcase.



He opened the magazine bundle. James had a lot of illustrated magazines sent to him from Germany, England, and especially France. Said he liked to look at pictures, and some day he hoped to learn to read.

Everhard turned out all but the reading-lamp by the head of the bed, propped himself on pillows, and idly turned the pages of a French magazine, pausing to look at a lay-out of pretty girls. It was Everhard's opinion that though Frenchwomen are not often beautiful, they have a unique charm, and brains in addition to legs, breasts, and such accessories as have made women famous throughout the ages. But there was one odd bizarre creature on this page. "*La femme sans un cœur.*" That was a sort of trade-name for Isobel de Nevers. It was considered bad luck to fool with her, since, having no heart, she didn't care what happened to you. A notorious woman, never seen except in a huge golden wig, a wax-like mask of powder, and be-spangled gowns. Theatrical critics tore their hair because during the past year she had been put on the vaudeville stage in a little singing act, and crowds went to see her—to the neglect of high-minded actresses.

Everhard drowsily pushed the magazine aside, reached up to the light, and though the gong was pounding and people ran about, calling, went to sleep.

## *Chapter Four*

### 1

EVERHARD lay in a deck chair with French magazines scattered over the rug, when a blue-eyed fat-bellied young man in knickers, cap, and rattlesnake stockings paused importantly to say: "We're getting up a ten-dollar pool. Want in?"

"Thanks, but I never indulge in hazards of any kind. Very bad," Everhard suggested reprovngly.

The fat youth with wandering glance eyed the magazine covers and grinned broadly. "I bet you've never been in Paris; now, have you?"

"But I have read of it."

The fat youth sank both hands into his side coat pockets and teetered back on his heels. "Say, but wouldn't I like to take you out some night and show you things! That's one town I know, brother." He glanced quickly at the drowsy girl in the chair beside Everhard's, and, seeing she was interested, gave his cap a pull, teetered some more with out-thrust of plump belly, tipped her a wink and inquired, "By the way, brother, what's your line back in God's Country?"

Everhard turned a page, not looking up. "I've never been in Judea."

The drowsy girl laughed softly. The fat youth looked blank. His ears suddenly grew pink. "Huh!" he said and stalked off.

"Nice," the drowsy girl murmured invitingly. She was huddled in her chair like a sleepy kitten. Tam, veil, shawl, and rug, concealed everything but the tip of a nose, a red mouth, and dark moist eyes.



Everhard got the impression that she was very young. It being the morning of the first day out, he had no idea at all of what she was like, but thought there ought to be a papa and mamma somewhere near. A scraggly graybeard in heavy dark glasses, with gloved hands holding the rug about his neck, and a stout motherly woman, had the chairs on the other side of her. He, without any thought in the matter, took it for granted they were her grandparents.

"Thank you," he said without interest. "Have a magazine?"

She did not stir, but murmured, "You are very kind."

"And you are French?"

Her drowsy eyes widened in a moment's peering. Her head stirred negatively. "No. Rumanian."

"That's fine. So am I." He knew no more Rumanian than a stevedore knows Sanskrit, but did know some Chinese phrases, and rattled them at her.

She laughed. "I am French, yes. But I hoped my accent wasn't that bad."

"You have no accent, child. You merely have the lilt."

"Child!" Playfully but earnestly: "I'm a divorcée."

"Isn't that too bad? And you seem such a nice girl, too."

He picked up another magazine, ignoring her friendliness. She could have the deck chair put elsewhere, and so try again. He wished her all that sort of luck that she wanted. The fat-bellied youth would be glad to play with her.

Five minutes later Everhard in changing magazines glanced at her. She lay motionless, a huddled kitten, drowsily peering at him. The red lips twitched faintly, and one eyelid fluttered. There was no lost motion in her technique.

He shook his head. "You heard what I told the fat boy?"

"You never never take chances of any kind?" Her voice was very soft.

"The fat boy likes to gamble."

She replied with a tiny shake of head, and smiled, but gave him an oddly tense look as if she searched to see what could possibly be wrong with her strategy. "Coward!" she whispered, laughing.

Everhard came upon another article about Isobel de Nevers. This was rather lengthy, with impatient penciled notations in James's hand on the margin. It appeared that this bizarre woman interested James very much. Opposite the criticism that she could not act was the notation, "The hell she can't!" There was a close-up of her face. The wig was said to be a fluff of spun gold. Her eyelids were purple as if grape-stained, the face wax-like. Only the devil would know what she really looked like with make-up off. Her smile had a definite lure, but her eyes seemed to be giving an honest warning.

Everhard suddenly turned the magazine over, looking at the date. It was six months old. "I see," he mused. "But if you think I'm going to try to reach the Death's Head by playing with this vamp of his, you guessed wrong. I'm strong enough to know my weaknesses. Nice little hint you've given!"

2

The luncheon gong sounded. Everhard got up and gathered his magazines into the seat of the chair. The drowsy girl still watched him.

"Not eating?"

"Not yet," she said. "It's the smells. Bad sailor."

"You're bad, all right," he thought unrepentantly, and pointed to the magazines: "Help yourself."

A murmur of thanks drifted after him as he limped away, thumping the deck with rubber-tipped cane.

Everhard had breakfasted alone, with three empty chairs bespeaking queasiness. Now a little fat red-faced man and a fat little white-faced woman were at the table, ready to gamble with food. Introductions passed.



"One down!" said the little fat man, pointing pudgily at the empty chair. He somehow seemed proud that somebody else was more seasick than he.

Half-way through lunch the little fat woman grew whiter of face and gasped, "Oh George, I . . . I . . . I . . ." She struggled up weakly from her chair and waddled away with a tense, preoccupied stare straight ahead as if she knew exactly what she was going to do. George went too, begging her in a tense whisper to wait . . . wait. So Everhard had all the iced olives to himself.

When he returned on deck the drowsy girl was almost sitting up. She held a magazine open at the picture of Isobel de Nevers. "Do you think she's pretty?"

"Never saw her," said Everhard. "Besides, she's a wicked woman and it would be wrong to think anything nice of her."

He nodded solemnly toward the dark amused eyes and went off. He played chess during the afternoon, and did not return to his chair until the first gong rang. The drowsy girl was gone.

Everhard glanced toward the chairs beyond hers. Poor old Grandpa lay there behind dark glasses, with frizzled beard sprayed along the rug's fringe. His cap was pulled tightly over his head. Grandma was gone, too. There was a dull shadowy stare behind the dark glasses as the eyes turned to watch Everhard.

"Not eating yet?" Everhard inquired sympathetically. Grandpa shook his head.

The fat little red-faced man had persuaded his wife to have another try at the food. Everhard thought them nice little Kewpie-like folks, and explained that some people were less troubled with queasiness if they didn't eat olives. Mrs. Kewpie transferred her three jumbos to the husband's plate.

"Blank again," said Mr. Kewpie, pointing proudly at the fourth empty chair.

A steward was coming to the table, followed by a slim,

lithe young woman. Her dark hair was drawn about her head in a plain old-fashioned way, and somehow conveyed that she had common-sense beyond her years. Her dark eyes were warmly moist and inscrutably steady in their mild directness. Her mouth had fine soft lines and none of them were noticeably weak. She wore a simple deep-blue frock with some lace and a frill or two, and no jewelry except a dinner-ring of jade.

Mr. Kewpie and Everhard got to their feet. Everhard guessed, but wouldn't have bet on who she was until she spoke. Her voice had the recognizable tone and lilt, but was coolly at ease. She was pleasant, yet eyed Everhard as if she had never seen him before. She introduced herself as "Miss Laramie."

Conversation wasn't much. Mrs. Kewpie didn't feel so good, and it made her feel worse to see the moist dark eyes resting attentively on her husband's face when he tried to be amusing; so Mrs. Kewpie kicked him on the shins. Everhard was so busily trying to figure out why he had got the impression that this cool young woman was a kittenish flirt that he let Mr. Kewpie get away with the last two olives.

The Kewpie couple withdrew, carrying fruit in dress-suit pockets and under a shawl.

Miss Laramie bent forward slightly as she raised a spoon from her ice and asked in an isn't-this-a-nice-day voice, "Now aren't you sorry?"

"No. Not yet."

"But you see, I really am old enough to play with."

"You're a sweet child, Cluckee. But you're wasting time. Go look for the fat boy."

Her dark eyes were level, unsmiling, yet amused. She shrugged a shoulder. There was a trace more of accent in her tone as she said, "But perhaps I do not waste my time—no?" She was quite sweet about it but with a hint of purposeful intention.

She and Everhard left the table together, but he de-



served her in the library and inquired about until he found the right purser's clerk. The clerk had a tight face, and even his ears were close to his head. He said "sir" every time he spoke, and held a pencil as if he could do surprising things with it, as a magician does.

"My name's Burnett," said Everhard.

The clerk repeated, "Mr. Burnett, sir," and tapped his lapel with backward flips of the pencil.

"How did Miss Laramie happen to be put at the table with me?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir. We must put everybody some place, sir." He seemed hopeful that Everhard would understand.

"And everybody should be encouraged to tell the truth." Everhard held out a folded bill.

The clerk took it, leaned forward slightly, waved his pencil shoulder-high, and said confidentially, "She asked, sir."

"Good! Now I know that she really wants to be near me. I was afraid it was merely an accident."

Everhard found the deck steward and discovered that the nice Miss Laramie had asked to have her chair placed beside Mr. Burnett's.

He then went through the darkness to the upper deck, squeezing by a couple here and there in the shadows who tried to pretend that they weren't there at all. The radio operator was alone.

"You never let any one see the messages that are handed in, do you?"

"Never, sir."

"That's right. You mustn't." Everhard laid two bills on the little table. They were big bills. Everhard pretended that he didn't know he was putting them there. "You know Miss Laramie?"

"No sir."

"You'll meet her. Lovely girl. She'll be coming here. Something will come for her. And it would be too bad—

wouldn't it?—if I got drowned from jumping overboard to pick up the pieces—after she tore up her messages?"

"It would that, sir!"

Everhard went out. The operator did not call him back to say that he had left something.

On the promenade deck Everhard peeked through a port into the library. Miss Laramie sat close to the window with an open magazine in her lap. The page she was reading was illustrated with a man dressed like a polo-player and a girl in evening dress, on the canopied back of a bejeweled elephant.

Everhard walked around the deck, paused to watch the moves of a chess game, listened to one of the purser's stories at a table in the bar, went to his room and amused himself writing a message in cipher.

Dear Cousin Jimmy: Her name is Laramie in case it has slipped your mind, and she is French in case you didn't know. And do I get a medal or something if I don't get drunk and confide in her? She is no good and can't even pretend to be bad. It is an art. I don't know what your idea is, but want to. Call her off. She's a nuisance.

He sent the message to the radio and went into the library.

"I have been reading such an interesting story," said Miss Laramie. A slim forefinger tapped the page illustrated with the canopied elephant. She had not turned the page in an hour.

### 3

The next day a radiogram, not in cipher, was handed to Everhard as he lay in the deck chair reading a novel while the drowsy Miss Laramie wakefully watched and waited. He put the message inside the book and read:

QUIT SEEING THINGS IN THE DARK STOP NEVER HEARD OF  
THE PARTY STOP IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR MANLY CHARMS



TO DO THEIR STUFF WEAR A VEIL STOP LOVE AND KISSES  
FROM J.

He folded the message and casually poked it into his pocket, then turned toward the girl. "I am sure you will be pleased to hear that my wife and children are well."

She smiled, murmuring, "I am very happy."

He read for a few minutes, took his cane, and went limping off. In the lavatory he wadded the radiogram into a ball and flushed it into the ocean.

When he went back on deck he pushed his chair a little nearer to hers. She watched without moving an eyelid. He leaned against the arm rest.

"Now that we fully trust each other," he said, "let's tell the truth. I'm a runaway bank cashier, but if you don't report me I'll try to be an honest man."

Miss Laramie did not smile, but said quietly: "I saw you come on board, and you looked nice. I am very, very lonely. That's all."

"No home? Friends? Money?" He tried not to let her see that he didn't intend to believe anything she said.

"My parents came from Paris to New York about five years ago. They are dead now. My husband drank. I have a little money. I am going back to Paris."

"Why did you say you were a Rumanian?"

"I won't tell you that . . . yet."

"Supposing I tell you. It's a French girl they're looking for, isn't it?"

She thought a moment, then shuddered, dropped her eyes, and pressed her face against the cushion. She nodded, forcing her face deeper into the cushion. "He was a beast, my husband." Her voice was low and muffled. "Drank and I . . . I must have been out of my mind!" She cried without making any sound. He could see tears dripping down along the side of her nose. She wiped gropingly at them with a handkerchief. She raised her head a little and smiled trustfully.

Everhard sat up, with his feet on the deck. He leaned slightly toward her. "You have made it very hard for me. I think you must have known all along who I am, and so tried to put me in a hole by having me notice what a sweet girl you are. We had a tip you might be on this boat. I was sent along to look the passengers over. I am Detective Sergeant Burnett of Headquarters."

She poked the handkerchief quickly into her mouth and shook with laughter. Her eyes were very bright, but still somehow inscrutable. The handkerchief came from her mouth, and she swore a Frenchman's oath, one that he had not heard since the war. Her fingers touched his hand. "You *are* a nice man!"

Everhard said to himself: "I guessed wrong. She is damned dangerous." He put his hands to a knee and rocked back, looking at the traces of the easy tears, remembering the ease with which she slipped into any part, from the kittenish flirt to the cool, elegant young woman.

She tossed back the rug and stirred, lithe and firm of body. Hers were woolen, not silk stockings. The sweater coat was woolen; the scarf at her neck too. There was a rougeless brightness about her lips. Very French but not Frenchy. She took his hand, not coquettishly. He might have been a big brother. "Let's walk." Her fingers were warm.

She led him limping to the boat deck, and backed against a ventilator, her hands in her sweater pockets. He, a bit uneasily, realized that he wanted to think she was a sweet, healthy, playful girl. She was looking up with mild interest, and he watched her lips, typically French in their rapid effortless rippling.

"I have nothing to do when you are away playing chess but doze and watch, and I believe the old man beside me is—how do you say it? *Phonee*?—when you aren't what you seem?"

"You should know. *Phony*. Yes. When you aren't what you seem." He grinned at her. "You don't seem the same



sort of girl any two hours at a time. Very phony, you. What about Grandpa?"

She shrugged her shoulder, amused. Her lips tightened to keep from laughing. "As for this grandpapa, I have watched him and—"

"False whiskers?" Everhard suggested.

"No, no, no. But kinky, wiry, coarse. He is not used to it. He is always scratching so—" She rubbed at her cheeks, illustrating—"with gloved fingers. He is not used to whiskers and does not like them."

"You think he is hiding something? And those glasses . . . Maybe you're right!"

"I know that I am right," she said slowly, without emphasis. "He has a little cushion. He brings it himself. He carries it away. Sometimes it makes little creaky sounds, that cushion. He is very careful with it."

"Wonder what cabin he has."

"Three-two-three," she said at once.

"Oh!"

She did not notice his exclamation, and looked at her finger-nails.

"How about Grandma?"

"She is not nervous. The grandpapa does not go to the dining-room. I think he stays where he can sit on his cushion while he eats."

"Maybe he is the runaway cashier, Cluckee."

"Vilette."

"Well, Vilette . . . Only, Cluckee comes easier. Do we shake him down or tell the captain and get our pictures in the paper?"

Her glance lifted enigmatically. "Would you?"

"What?"

"Shake him down, as you call it?" The moist-eyed stare had a wise look that mingled with a glow of wondering. "Would you, please?"

"Depends. I'd do anything for money, enough money. Wouldn't you?"

She hesitated, searchingly. "Of course," quite simply, nodding quickly.

"I'll tell you, Cluckee—"

"Vilette, if you please," she suggested with mild firmness, but smiled. "I do not like that Cluck-ee. Do you think I am a baby chickee?"

"You go back and watch. If either Grandpa or Grandma stirs, run ahead and bang on three-two-three. I'll be in there."

"You will do that?"

"I'll learn something about 'em. Why not? There'd be fewer crooks in the world if we honest boys and girls made 'em divvy."

"No, you will find nothing. It is in the cushion. It isn't comfortable for him to lie on. I can tell by the way he squirms, and puts it beside him. He will not let Grandma carry it."

4

Everhard went downstairs, thinking: "She can act. She sees everything. She didn't even wonder that I wondered that she knew his cabin number. Worst of all, she makes me want to like her. And that's bad."

He did not go to 323, but turned into a corridor and entered 381. It was tiny cabin with two berths, now occupied by only one person. He snapped the lock to keep out any stewardess, glanced about, and drew a suitcase from under the lower berth. It was unlocked. He messed things up in dumping underwear and such on to the berth, and looked for a false bottom or side pocket. He went through the dressing-case. Here was a small jewel-box with inexpensive trinkets, rings, pins, necklaces. Not a diamond among them. He sorted them rapidly and put the most valuable, including the jade dinner-ring, into his pocket. He opened drawers. He had not found a scrap of paper. Yet he was sure that little handbag she carried did not contain what he was after. He fumbled among dresses in



the closet and in an inside pocket of a coat found the passport.

"Mlle. Vilette Laramie, French citizen. Age, 22. Student." She had arrived in New York on September 26. The *Trivilia* sailed at midnight on September 28.

"That tells a lot," he reflected. "As for the age, twenty-two, it means nothing. She can be any age she likes."

He returned the passport to its pocket, opened the door an eighth of an inch, listened, stepped into the corridor, and knocked on the door directly opposite. No answer. He went in. It was the same sort of cabin. Two people were occupying it; husband and wife. He hastily messed things about, but took nothing.

Miss Laramie saw him coming along the deck and stirred drowsily, turning from Grandpa's side, and glanced up inquiringly. He shook his head.

## 5

Late that afternoon Everhard took a cipher to the radio room. The same operator he had talked with was on duty, but listening to something that was not important, because he at once took off the head-piece. He shook his head. "Nothing has come. Or been sent."

"But does the other boy feel the same way about it?"

"I go over the files when I come on duty, sir."

"Good. Here's a little something to send." Everhard put down the message and a bill. "Never mind the change. Good night."

At dinner-time the ship was buzzing with something new to talk about. Mr. and Mrs. Kewpie were the center of attention. Captain, purser, and other people had visited their cabin and looked in. But nothing was missing. The sneak-thief must have been frightened off before he could pocket anything; and the Kewpie-like couple were so busy telling people about it that they were not at the table when Miss Laramie came.

Everhard placed the chair for her.

"So you get first chance at the olives to-night." She glanced mischievously aslant at him.

"Yes. Haven't you heard? They had a burglar. He must have taken their appetite."

With elbow on the table and forearm erect, she carefully scrutinized the polished nail of the third finger of her left hand. "Yes, I heard. They are right across from me. They knocked on my door. I was dressing. They wanted to know if he had been in my room." Her hand dropped and disappeared under the table. She pulled lightly at the ends of the napkin and her glance rested inattentively on the butter-balls.

"And had he?"

Miss Laramie's dark eyes flashed in a lifting glance, for a moment direct and unsmiling. She smiled and put out her hand. "How do Americans say that clever thing? Ah . . . eventually . . . why not now?"

Everhard, the poker-player, looked at her. His face was as unreadable as a closed book. It did no good. She knew the cards he held. She moved the slim fingers of the extended hand, mildly impatient, smiled, with a laughing look in her eyes, too. Without a word, and with no change of expression, he drew the napkin through his fingers and dipped his fingers into a vest pocket. He put the half-dozen rings into her palm.

"Thank you." She picked out the jade, laid it on the table, and dropped the others into her tiny beaded bag, then slipped on the green ring, and held up the back of her hand, looking at it.

"I'll take it all back," said Everhard. "You *are* good!"

She smiled appreciatively, and asked, "How could I help but guess?" as she dropped her hand and looked at him with amused friendliness.

"But there really are sneak-thieves in the world. Or so I've read."

"I should have kept that passport with me. But I will



learn, Monsieur Burnett. I am young, you know. But please, you tell me. How did *you* guess almost the moment you laid eyes on me?"

"You liked me too much, all in a hurry. That is, if you want truth."

Miss Laramie reflected like one who studies a mistake, meaning not to repeat it.

"And I wrote in my diary, 'Dangerous child, but not good enough to be bad.' However, I shall admit the mistake to my diary to-night."

"You keep no diary," she said, quite as if saying, "You haven't a gray hair in your head."

He studied the words and her face. "You've looked?"

"And didn't mess your things up as you did mine. It is wrong to steal—and worse to be so crude that you have to steal to throw one off. I am really surprised at you, Detective Sergeant Burnett of Headquarters!"

Everhard bit into a olive, and held the olive near his lips as he asked, "Why did they send you?"

"They make mistakes too, I suppose."

"Who's 'they'?" he asked blandly, laying aside the pit, not watching her.

"The same as 'them,' " she said even more blandly.

Their glances met and both smiled.

Mr. and Mrs. Kewpie came hurrying with a bouncing waddle, beaming and waving pudgy hands to the greeting of friends as they passed tables. They found it joyous to be the center of interest.

"Oh, such excitement!" said Mr. Kewpie.

"Now George, let me tell it. You never get anything straight. You see, when I went down to dress for dinner, I found . . ."

Mr. Kewpie reached for the olive dish. It was empty.

## Chapter Five

### 1

A FEW days later a message came from James in cipher:

BRIGHT BOY STOP YOU GUESSED RIGHT STOP SHE WAS SENT ACROSS TO LOOK FOR WEAK SPOTS STOP THEY KNOW SHE FUMBLER BECAUSE I HAD TO CABLE ACROSS TO SEE IF IT WAS O.K. OR IF THE DEVIL WAS ALREADY SITTING IN ON OUR LITTLE GAME STOP SHE WILL CATCH HELL SO BE GOOD TO HER STOP AS FOR GRANDPA I AM ASKING THE CAPTAIN TO KEEP AN EYE ON HIM AND PASSING ON YOUR TIP TO BOTH PLYMOUTH AND CHERBOURG.

Everhard also saw, thanks to the courtesy of the operator, the radiogram that came to Miss Laramie from Paris. It was in English: "Since you have failed avoid him. X." She returned no answer, but evidently intended to obey instructions, because she did not come to breakfast nor to the deck chair.

Everhard wished Grandpa a cheery "good morning" and received a grunt, and a shadowy glare from behind the dark glasses. Even Grandma, a stout heavy-faced woman, eyed him as if he were a most immoral man.

"Nice weather," Everhard insisted. It was beastly weather, cold and windy.

Grandpa went to sleep and did not hear, or at least answer.

Everhard strolled around the deck, meditating, then he gave the sailor at the third-class gangway a dollar to look at a whale. The sailor had to look so hard that Everhard slipped across unnoticed.



A freckle-faced boy who wore a beret and a highly blond girl with skirts swishing knee-high, and impudence all over her, were at shuffle-board. They, being warm-blooded, did not care about the dank windy chill.

Everhard said, "Well well, Charlie! Awfully glad to see you," and put out his hand.

The freckle-faced boy turned up a what-the-hell-sort of look, and glanced inquiringly at the girl.

"Dumb-head!" She slapped the boy's back, pushing. "Shake hands with Uncle Joseph." She pointed.

The boy glanced at the offered hand, grabbed it, pumped hard, and took away the bill. "Glad to see you, Joseph! You bet!" He was trying to get the bill into his trouser pocket, but the girl nuzzled against him, hissing, "Only over my dead body! Gimme!"

She slipped her hands down along his arm and pried open the fingers that were going pocketward. She looked at the bill's corner, gave Everhard a bursting smile, lifted her skirt, poked, and snapped the garter.

"Shake hands with Uncle Joseph some more," she said impudently, giving the beret boy another push; and to Everhard: "So good of you to look us up. Now, what's the joke? We'll laugh."

"Going? Or going back?" Everhard flipped a finger toward the beret.

"Back. To crash the Luxembourg!" The boy narrowed his eyes.

"Be a long cold winter—in the art colony," Everhard suggested, fingering another bill.

"Anything this side of murder!" said the boy.

"And me, I don't mind a little murder or two," said the girl. "I'm from Chicago." She leveled both forefingers and wagged her thumbs, saying "Whr-r-r-urr! Tommy gun stuff is my line. All boobs fall for me . . . don't they, Speckles?"

"Cut it out," said the freckled boy. "Uncle Joseph wants to tell us something."

"We're bored over there," said Everhard. "Nothing happens. A little vaudeville—sort of impromptu. How about it?"

"A twin to this—" she shook her blond head backward into the wind and slapped her silken leg—"and I'll anything. You tell it. We'll do it." She held out her hand demanding.

## 2

Everhard and Miss Laramie sat with their chairs so close together that each held half of the same magazine. They looked at pictures. The magazine dropped as a woman's frightened squawk rang out.

There was the clattering click of running feet; more squawks. The blond girl from Chicago came with hair flying and short skirt jerked above her silken knees. She ran for her life—or seemed to. Two jumps behind, a freckled man with beret aslant ran with hand outstretched, cursing. Drowsy idlers in the deck chairs sat upright as if pin-pricked and got to their feet with stumble and kick at rugs, then surged into an open-mouthed huddle as the beret boy caught the girl's flying hair and struck her. She turned, suddenly resolute. It was a cat fight. They put on a show that brought even bridge-players from the saloon, cards in hand. A great clamor rose from passengers. Men in double-breasted blue coats with braid on their caps pushed, struggling to get through the huddle about the fight. The passengers themselves didn't feel like interfering: the blond girl was getting the best of it. People stood up on their steamer-chairs to see over other people's heads.

The fighting blonde and the freckled boy, suddenly silent, were hustled off toward the captain's quarters. The fight was over. Grandpa's cushion was gone, and so was Everhard, with a slight bulge under his loose top-coat.



## 3

In his state-room Everhard fingered the cushion and felt reassured. The strangely observant Miss Laramie had been right. It was lumpy and a bit creaky. Grandpa no doubt had meant to go through Customs wearing it under shirt and belt-buckle as a full stomach, scarcely noticeable beneath the drooping fold of an overcoat.

Everhard locked the door, put his stick aside, took off cap and coat, and spread overlapping newspapers on the floor. He put the cushion in the center of the spread papers and ripped with a penknife. His fingers groped sensitively inside the padding of silk floss. He drew out a sheaf of fresh bills, riffled their ends, and said to himself noiselessly, "Mother of Moses—whoever she was!" He pulled at other sheafs, dusting the floss off carefully over the newspapers, and grinning. "Poor old hard-to-work Grandpa! His lifetime stealings all gone."

Everhard took a thousand-dollar bill, turned on the light, and held the bill against it. He closed his eyes and rubbed it with the gambler's *feel*. His finger-tips were as sensitive as eyes. He gave the bill a flip and watched it drift with zigzag planing and settle to the floor. He whistled softly without sound and put his hands into his pockets as if resolutely keeping them from temptation.

"The kidnapping of that millionaire was kept out of the papers. After paying this ransom, the poor old boy'll have to sell apples. And at his age too. A shame."

He squatted, haunch to heels, and fingered the sheafs; but that position brought too much weight on the split pea in his shoe, so he sat cross-legged, hastily counting—or, rather, estimating—the money. He murmured: "Grandpa, I've done you wrong. I thought you was from Oshkosh. You're a New York cop, vacationing."

A nice part of the loot's value, from the thief's point of view, was that the bills did not run in serial numbers.

Bank jobs usually do. Grandpa was no jay-town president doing a lam.

Everhard got up suddenly and walked to the mirror. He stared at himself eye-to-eye, and inquired argumentatively, "You'd like to, wouldn't you?" He grinned, nodding. "You damned thief!" The damned thief looked out from the mirror and suggested that a quarter of a million dollars was a lot of money. Everhard agreed, but said inaudibly, "But so far I haven't let you go hungry."

He took a slip from a pillow and, crouching, laid in the sheafs of money, placing them neatly. He tucked in the corners, folded over the flap, got needle and thread from his "bachelor's friend," and sewed up the pillow-slip. He folded over the newspaper on the floor, rolling the cushion and scattered floss into a tight package, and tied it firmly with string, then went about on his hands and knees, looking for any film of floss. There wasn't any.

He unlocked his suitcases, not wanting them knifed, and put the two automatics and extra clips into his pockets, not wanting them found. He poked a bit of cardboard into the side of a suitcase so that if it were opened the cardboard would drop, and looked about thoughtfully but satisfied.

He put on his top-coat, stuffed the sewed pillow-slip under one arm below the coat, and the package wrapped with newspaper under the other. He remembered the pillow from which he had taken the slip. Would not do to leave that. He put aside the newspaper package, but kept the money under his arm, and took up the slipless pillow, hiding it under his coat. He stepped into the corridor, passed several cabins, knocked on a door lightly, then went in. Ten seconds later he was returning to his own quarters, under his coat a pillow in a fresh slip.

Everhard went at once to the boat deck, watched his chance when no one was looking, and tossed the news-



paper package down a ventilator. Whoever found it could think what he liked. Grandpa couldn't tell his troubles to anybody, and give a description of the missing cushion. "That's the worst of being a thief," Everhard mused. "You've got to keep your mouth shut."

He went down to the purser's office, not to the window, but to the door, where he beckoned to the flat-eared clerk.

"I'm due in Brussels as chief witness on a case. I've reason to think there's somebody on board that doesn't want certain evidence to leave the ship—not in my hands. I've used a pillow-case. Charge me with the case. And put it in the safe, will you?"

"Certainly, Mr. Burnett."

The clerk sealed the case and gave Everhard the ticket. He looked expectant, but did not get a tip. Evidently, he thought, Everhard must have been telling the truth.

Everhard went into the saloon and sat down at the same table where a chess game was being played. He unobtrusively pushed the button, suggested that the players have something. He ordered Vichy and chewing-gum for himself. The players took beer.

He sipped Vichy and chewed gum. He worked the gum into two balls between his teeth, took out the gum, tossed one ball into the cuspidor, and palmed the other. He leaned forward, bending low to study the board, and, reaching far under the table, pressed the gum and purser's ticket carefully against the under side.

Grandpa came along with his colored glasses low down on his nose so he could see over them. His long flappy overcoat sagged. He turned his head from side to side as if anxiously looking for somebody. He peered about the room, turning round and round, then went away, shuffling with head out-thrust, seemingly worried about something.

Everhard went out on deck, followed by a boy carrying two hot lemonades.

Miss Laramie stirred out of her steamer-rug and said, "How nice!" There was not even the hint of inquiry in

her glance. She seemed to have forgotten all about the cushion.

Grandpa was gone, but Grandma wasn't. Now and then Grandma would sit up, reach over and move Grandpa's rug, and peer about to see if the cushion had come back—or somehow been overlooked in the previous searching. Then she moved into Grandpa's chair and pretended to sleep, but she had brushed the hair away from her left ear.

Miss Laramie said: "Excuse me a minute. I will be right back."

She returned shortly, carrying a magazine. "I wanted this, and saw the woman who had it going to the library."

They sipped lemonade and spoke of Plymouth, due tomorrow. Everhard mentioned the day's run. They spoke of the ruckus and wondered what the captain might have said to the blond girl and the freckled boy. Through all the trivial chit-chat her dark eyes were blandly incurious. He thought that almost unfeminine of her; and decided that lack of curiosity was the only unfeminine trait he could admire in a woman. He found it mystifying and felt that somehow he ought to be a little suspicious because what isn't natural should be distrusted.

The first gong rang.

"Already!" said Miss Laramie, and pushed aside the rug. She pulled down her skirt and stood up. "I simply must have a little walk before dinner. Coming along?" She twitched at her scarf, sending it about her neck, leaving an end to wave in the breeze like a banner.

He fell in beside her, limping slowly with thump of rubber-tipped cane.

"Did Grandpa show any interest, after the fight, Cluckee?"

"He looked as if he might faint. He shook his rug. He got down on his knees. I thought he was about to pray, but it was only to look under the chair. He swore at Grandma and made her stand up and shake herself. He



asked me to sit up. Or, rather, told me. He almost felt my breasts. He had taken off his glasses; I've never seen such wicked eyes, and I know lots and lots of people who aren't nice. He got down on his knees again."

"You knew he wasn't looking for a collar-button. Cluckee, are you an honest girl?"

She smiled with flutter of lashes. "Sometimes."

"Do you turn in lost umbrellas and vanity-cases? Pretty ones, I mean?"

"So far."

"Then you don't want to go with me to the south of Italy? Spend the winter?"

"On Grandpapa's ticket?"

"Yes."

She studied his face. Her dark eyes were a little perplexed, but her mouth smiled luringly and her eyes brightened as she nodded. "Oh, let's do!" Her gloved fingers caught his arm and pressed with blood-tingling caress, and the upturned face glowed unspoken promises.

"If I didn't have a wife waiting for me, you would surely be nice to go with," he said. He lifted his cane and glanced inspectingly at the tip.

Miss Laramie frowned, puzzled. He said it, and looked, exactly as if he did have a wife waiting for him and must tell the truth about it.

"Please, do not say things like that. And do you think I care how many wives you have?" She pursed her red unrouged lips in a lovable pout, and her dark eyes were wistful. Her fingers closed more tightly on his arm.

Everhard said nothing until they were overtaken and passed by a striding couple that were in a hurry to do their mile. When they were well by he asked, "Cluckee, will it be all right for your name—not your real name but the one you are using now—to be in the papers?"

"Please, no!" There was a startled emphasis in the protest.

"And a picture of your sweet face would be worse?"

"No, no, no!" she said hastily. "Why do you ask? I am supposed to be on a visit to my family in Spain."

"Why Spain?"

"I do speak Spanish. I don't know why I said Rumanian. I might have said Italian—or Spanish."

"But you wanted to tell me something utterly unreal so I'd have less chance to guess? You thought I might be suspicious of a French girl, hm?"

"Ah, monsieur," she said with affectionate warning, "do not ask the questions, now. There are many things that I must tell you soon. But the one that really matters is I . . . do . . . love . . . you!" Her head bobbed prettily, emphasizing each of the words, and she caught at his hand with both of hers, from which the gloves had been hastily stripped.

"I know. You told me that the minute we met. The first morning." His casualness brought the puzzled look back to her face. He grinned at her, and on pretense of pushing a flying wisp of loose hair from her face, pulled it, saying enigmatically, "I see, I'm not out of the woods yet."

"Do you not like me?"

"You'll think so when you see what I shall give you from Grandpa's—guess how much."

"Very much?"

"Enough for a pleasant winter at Naples. Above six million francs."

"*Mon dieu!* Really?"

"How much of it do you want?"

She shook her head, watching him.

"If you shake your head at six million, just what is your price, Cluckee?"

She moved closer with face uplifted, whispering, "Any little thing—or nothing, from you!" Her eyes dropped with a lingering flutter of promises and she rubbed her cheek against his arm.

"You are going to be surprised at how generous I am."

There was no possible way for her to tell what he



meant; but she tried, with an alert, shrewd, searching look. Then with petulant mystification and retaliatory hint, she murmured, "I think maybe too that some one else is also surprised—soon!" She laughed a friendly warning, then ran from him and went to dress for dinner.

Everhard cautiously opened the door of his state-room, ready for visitors. He knew that Grandpa couldn't have got his hands on a quarter of a million dollars without being a smart man.

Everhard nosed about inquiringly, and did not need the piece of cardboard on the rug to see that his room had been searched, cautiously but without Miss Laramie's dexterous touch.

## Chapter Six

### 1

THERE were clowns' caps, puffballs, and confetti ribbons at the dinner tables because the *Trivilia* was due at Plymouth the next day. Mr. Kewpie poked his fat little ball of a head into a colored cone and energetically heaved puffballs at ladies while Everhard ate olives. Mrs. Kewpie nearly burst her corset in throwing things at the purser, who was a handsome man, and after many far-flung throws got a string of colored paper into his soup.

Vilette Laramie looked like a demure princess under a beruffled cardboard diadem. Her dark silken hair was twisted maturely about her young head. She had lovely hands. She mischievously slipped the olive dish nearer to Everhard's plate and took such a flattering interest in Mr. Kewpie's antics that he lost out badly on the olives. But otherwise she was more quiet than ever.

That evening Everhard remained with her. Being a cripple, he could not dance, and she didn't. He watched, a little suspiciously, the mysterious half-furtive glow in her eyes that were strangely thoughtful when she lapsed into a moment's silence.

"What's wrong, Cluckee?"

"I am quite happy. Is that wrong?"

"Something up your sleeve, eh?"

"Of course not. Absurd. How can you? A mere child, such as I?"

"You've aged fast."

He went to her cabin with her and stepped inside for a suspicious look about. Her things were in slight disorder.



"Now, Miss Detective, guess who was your visitor this time."

She moved a forefinger about her face, drawing whiskers.

"You won't be uneasy?"

"I? At this? Ho-o!" She pitched her handbag on to the bed and turned. "If you but knew . . . some things!" She thoughtfully put the tips of her fingers together, watching as if doing something difficult and delicate. Her hands dropped, and with upward look she smiled shyly. "You messed my things worse than this, and I slept quite all right."

"But mine was a friendly interest—no?"

"I wonder . . ." Her look was soft, mysterious, alluring. "I wonder if it would be if you knew . . . something."

Somehow, without seeming to move she had got close to him, almost against him. He put an arm around her. Unresisting, she swayed close. He mussed her hair a little, pulled at an ear-lobe, fiddled with a locket, and lifted her chin on a forefinger; then kissed her on lips that moved not at all.

"How," she asked calmly, "did you know that I am a lady's maid? And this, now? After you were afraid before?"

"Then you aren't going to Italy with me?"

"Oh certainly! But I am curious."

"Very well. Ours was a little game, wasn't it? You were sent across to come back with me. See if I was human. I won the game, but I am nevertheless human. Besides, what's wrong with kissing a pretty girl who is playing on your side? Until I was sure, I restrained myself." Then, more seriously: "Don't worry, Cluckee. Monsieur X. won't be so hard on you. You are to have all the credit for turning in Grandpa."

Her eyes steadied, and with a slow shake of her head she laughed, not happily. "I don't know what you

will think." Her voice was solemnly calm. The dark eyes fell broodingly. A tear or two trickled. She lifted her hands suddenly to his shoulders, held him back gently at arm's length, and the trembling of her lips became unhappy low pleading: "Don't go to Paris!" Her tone did not warn; it begged.

"Too late to start a new deal, don't you think?"

"New deal?"

"If you can stop me from going to Paris, then they'll know I'm not the man they want. And you'll get all the credit for spotting weaknesses."

"It isn't that!" she cried in a low voice, full of pain, and clutched him convulsively, pressing against him. She locked her hands behind his head, and her eyes glistened bright, hot, intense, through the tears. "It is because I do love you. Don't you know . . . haven't you even guessed? It is you who have been tricked."

"Be nothing new in my life." He was unimpressed.

She, desperately tense, shook him, pleading: "Don't you see I am risking everything to warn you? And you laugh at me! Oh, please believe me! They learned that this Monsieur X. was sending a woman across to watch you, return with you on the boat." The words came as fast as a bee's hum. "She started, but that was all. What happened, I of course do not know. But I was given her passport. I am as young . . . almost . . . as she. I have her eyes. I too speak languages. That is why I called myself Rumanian. She meant to call herself that. She speaks it. I do not. There I made a slip. Monsieur X. does not yet know that she is not on this boat."

"You are lying." He said it indifferently and so concealed the feeling that perhaps she wasn't. "Besides, you can't lie well enough to get by Grandpa's millions. You turned 'em down cold. No daughter of the devil would. Wiggle out of that one."

"I take that money? I'd be suspected, questioned, not



believed. We never dare to deceive La Tête de Mort. Besides, he will get the money anyhow and reward me."

"How the hell will he get it? I've got it."

"No, no, dear. The purser has it."

"You don't snooze in that chair as much as you pretend, do you?"

She smiled a little, and hesitatingly looked as if about to say something surprising; then did: "I know all about you, Don Everhard. Know all that the real Vilette Laramie knew, for she told them everything. They have a way of getting answers when they question. Oh, why try to fool La Tête de Mort?"

"You know, I think I'd better choke you." He considered it reflectively, not in earnest but as if he might be soon.

"Some day somebody will, for talking to you like this. We daughters of La Tête de Mort must not fall in love. And don't, don't, don't go to Paris! You are known. You will be shot down, stabbed, drowned—"

"Cluckee, you're lying like hell. If you can scare me out, I'll go to the discards and you'll be ace high again with Monsieur X."

"Won't you believe me? Please?"

"No. But you love me?"

She nodded yieldingly.

"Good!" he said. "I don't know, to tell the truth, whether you're phony or not. But I'm going to Paris. If you love me—or yourself—kick in and help me chase Mr. Death's Head out of the woodpile."

"Darling, I am not lying," she said tenderly and pressed against him, her slim hands at the back of his head. "But please do not go to Paris, dear. Take the money—Grand-papa's—and go to Italy. Wait for me there. I will come. I will give you back the ticket and nobody will ever know that—"

"You'll give me what?" Everhard asked, puzzled.

She drew away quickly, stepping back. Without looking, she reached a groping hand toward the handbag on the bed. With no downward glance, she opened the bag, felt about with slender fingers, and drew out the purser's receipt, offering it.

Everhard eyed it, touching her hand, not the ticket, until he saw the chewing-gum's mark. He pushed the hand aside, gently; then with the gambler's smile: "You win. I can't beat that one." He patted her cheek lightly, with approval.

She again offered the receipt; he again gently put her hand aside.

"Not I! And I won't peep. It's all yours. To do with as you please. You've the best right to it, anyhow. Spotted Grandpa." He added softly: "I'm going now. But one question, if I may. How'd you do it?"

She shrugged her shoulders, her glance following the receipt that she idly put back into the bag. The bag clicked. A jerking flip of her wrist and it fell again on the bed. She was standing well back now, more than an arm's length from him. Her hands lifted and moved sensitively about her hair, touching the strands that he had mussed out of place.

"When a man who never chews gum does chew gum right after he has received a ticket that he doesn't want stolen . . . beloved, wouldn't you look for it under the table where you saw him sitting while he chewed gum?" She said it quietly, without any glee at all, quite as if the thing were too simple for vanity; but she shook her head at him, reprovingly.

"And what," he asked, "did you say to the chess-players, when you left me and went in for the magazine?"

"That I might have dropped the setting of a ring there this morning. They were so helpful and looked all about. I did not find the setting." Then, wistfully and motionless: "Now you won't go to Paris, will you?"

He said nothing.



She watched his face, meeting the enigmatic look and silence. Her voice, very low, urged: "All that money, and no one will know. And I will come to you just as soon as I can arrange things." She paused, waiting expectantly.

It seemed that he was not going to speak, but just stand and look. His face told nothing. His blue-gray eyes narrowed a little and there was a queer tiny gleam in the pupils. He smiled. The mouth was a little twisted but pleasant. Very softly and slowly he said: "You are good. If you want the truth, I'll be damned if I know whether or not you're bluffing. But I'll call you. I am going to Paris."

He nodded, pleasantly, then turned, opened the door, and stepped through. The door closed.

Vilette stood with an arm out as if silently begging him to come back. She moved quickly, then stopped without opening the door, and her fingers listlessly moved the latch, locking it. In a kind of trance-like brooding she opened the purse and half absently took out a cigarette, lighted it, and went to the mirror. She breathed smoke at the mirror and murmured wisely to her shadowed image, "I shall feel sorry for you if you do end by loving him."

## 2

Everhard took a turn about the deserted deck. He said to himself that he knew damn well she wasn't a La Tête de Mort girl. Yet, after all, was she?

He opened the door of his state-room, went in, pushed the door to, and the cane he held clicked against the bulkhead as he reached for the light-switch. The light came on. He set the cane in a corner and was shifting out of his top-coat as he turned.

Grandpa stood there, without overcoat, hat, gloves, or glasses. But he had a gun. Everhard let the overcoat drop about his heels, and looked at the gun with interest, pleased to see that it was not one of his. Automatic .45's

were rather a nuisance with dinner clothes. He had worn them, lots of times—both of them—for he rather liked having two guns at hand; but to-night, after he knew the room had been searched, he had put them away.

Grandpa, a patient old fellow, looked businesslike. He had had a long wait and seemed peevish. "Sit down, you sonofabitch!"

"Thanks," said Everhard, and limped painfully to a small straight-backed chair. "My leg is bad. Thoughtful of you."

"To hell with your leg!" Grandpa's voice was jerky. He spoke as if grinding the words. "Make a move and I'll kill you. Kill you anyhow if—"

"How in the world did you ever guess it?" Everhard asked brightly.

"You lousy bastard! I finally woke up and went third-class. The blonde told me."

"I'll bet that baby nicked you for twenty bucks before she'd talk. Didn't she?"

"Shut up, goddamnyou! Where's the stuff?"

"Purser's got it," said Everhard.

"Where's the ticket?"

"Under a table in the game-room. Chess-table."

"No it's not! I looked. After what she told me I remembered you'd been there. Chewing gum."

"Bad habit. I'll never do it again. But you didn't look carefully."

"The hell I didn't! I found the gum, fresh gum, but you can't string me!"

"Then it dropped and got swept out by the porter. Now it's overboard. Too bad, Grandpa."

Grandpa's hand trembled with anger. He wanted to bite. "I'm going to kill you, and now!"

"Not me, you won't, not now. You may try it after we've split the money. But then I'll walk backward with a gun in front of me."



"Split my ——." He said unprintable things. "I don't give you a dime! Get that, you ——."

"You try to get it."

"What d'you mean?"

"You know damn well what I mean, Grandpa. Kill me and try to claim that stuff on a cock-and-bull story but with no receipt. I've lost the ticket. Tickets do get lost. I can fix it with that flat-eared clerk. If you think you can, shoot."

"When'll you get it?"

"How much is my cut?"

"Ten thousand."

"Yeah?" Everhard looked Grandpa over carefully with a gambler's eyes, noticing why he had been wearing very dark glasses and gloves, and knew that Grandpa would have killed him as quick as step on a bug except that \$250,000 was too much to pay for the pleasure.

"I believe you've got that ticket," said Grandpa, suspiciously.

"You're a liar. But if you really think so, just lead me into the bathroom, to splatter my brains. The room steward's a nice boy. I'd like to save him as much work as possible."

"Stop your goddamned wise-cracking, will you!" Grandpa fairly screamed, and leaned forward, thrusting out the gun.

"Ticket or no ticket, *you* try to claim a package the purser's clerk knows I planted and see what kind of hardware they put on your wrists. With me dead, you wouldn't have a chance. You'd have to describe the contents. This boat's going back to America, you know. You'd go back with it, in irons. Maybe somebody you know would be at the dock with badges on. Reception committee—for Brother Jones, church trustee and banker of Oshkosh."

"Twenty thousand!"

"In real money?"

"Not another goddamned dime. I'll kill you first."

"Don't lie to me, Grandpa. Makes me feel bad. I didn't do anything wrong. Just curiosity, you know. Wanted to see why you wouldn't let Grandma carry the cushion."

"You know who I am?" The question seemed important.

Everhard answered readily, "Never saw you in my life or anybody that looks like you—outside of the Middle West."

Grandpa seemed to relax a little and absently scratched his cheek with his left hand.

"And let's look at this thing from all sides, Grandpa."

"Stop calling me that."

"All right, Fuzzy."

"You're a smart bastard, you are!"

"Smarter than you think," said Everhard, with challenge. "I not only have to hold up my own end but point out your advantages too." His voice was earnest even if still a little mocking.

"What d'you mean?"

"Make it fifty and I'll tell you."

"Fifty, then. But not another dime," Grandpa said at once, relieved.

"I've heard that before."

"And no welching."

"Never welched in my life. But listen, you've got me with my pants down too. If you hadn't tumbled I'd have been in the clear. But you are smart—and tumbled. One word to the purser from you—just a hint—and I couldn't touch that stuff either. So, you see, we really have to play together. Help each other." Everhard stood up. "So now that's settled. You can call for me—" Everhard's leg was weak; he held to the chair for support—"in the morning, and we'll go to the purser's office together."

"You think I'm going to let you out of my sight? Not much I won't, you ——." Grandpa repeated himself profanely.



"All right." Everhard seemed resigned. "When a thing has to be done, it has to be done, however you can do it, so . . ."

He had the chair off the floor and started in a sideswirl before Grandpa shot in jerky haste. A rung caught the extended wrist and splintered. The bullet splattered against the steel bulkhead and the gun dropped from a broken wrist. Everhard threw the chair away and jumped. Grandpa, a skinny, wiry man, went over backward, right on to the bed, with two hands on his ropy throat and Everhard's knee in his belly. Everhard jerked Grandpa's head up, let go with one hand, and gave him the tip of a swinging elbow squarely on the jaw. A gambler has to be careful of swollen knuckles; messes up his technique at cards, and gun-play too. Grandpa was out, clear out, with bearded mouth open and long skinny body as lax as old rope.

Everhard fastidiously brushed his palms together as if wiping off a little dirt and backed away, watchfully. He picked up the gun. A dinky .32. Everhard considered such guns as little more than trinkets. He set the chair upright, bending to look with interest at the broken rung, and paused, listening. He knew that the cabin next to his state-room was not occupied. Perhaps the shot had not been noticed. He backed to the shoe drawer below the closet, lifted the rumpled sock off of a shoe, and took out a .45, slipping it down into a front trouser pocket.

He went to a mirror and, keeping an eye glancing back across his shoulder, retied his bow, pulled down his vest, brushed his hair. Everhard did not like to let any one see him rumpled. It might give the impression that perhaps he did at times get excited. Then he rang for the steward.

The steward was a long time coming. Everhard had a bill ready and stood at the half-open door, handing out the bill before he began to talk.

"Steward, this is important, as you can see." He gestured slightly at the bill now in the steward's hand. "Do

what you're told, just as I tell it, and there'll be another on the table in the morning."

"Ohyessir!"

"Good. First, go to Cabin Three eighty-one. Miss Laramie's. Tell her to come here at once and—"

"Oh but, sir!"

"This is one time a lady can come to a man's room, with the captain's permission. Tell her she isn't to dress, but to hurry. If she hesitates, tell her Grandpa has spilled the beans and I want her to listen in."

"Right-o, sir!"

"Wait a minute. There's more. Then go to the captain. Talk to him alone—whether he's asleep, on the bridge, or dying. Tell him to come here alone, and at once."

"Oh sir!" The steward sounded doubtful.

"Tell him he's already had a confidential wireless from James of Washington about this matter. He'll come."

"Yes sir!"

"And steward, then you forget all about it."

"Oh yes sir!"

"And don't recover your memory after the reporters come on board."

"No sir."

"Good. Now skid on the corners getting there."

3

Grandpa groaned, pulled a hand toward his face, drew up a leg, then suddenly put the hand to his belly. He opened his eyes, groaned, sat up as if with the cramps, and stared. Bad eyes he had. Bad words, too. He cursed, viciously.

Everhard, beside the door, waiting, spoke indifferently: "Think what you like and say it too, but start something and you go to the pen's hot spot in a wheel-chair. I don't cheat the electrician out of his fee."

"Then you know me!" Grandpa caught at his throat as if the words hurt him.



Everhard rubbed the tip of his elbow and eyed him, not speaking.

Grandpa wilted. He felt of his broken wrist, rubbed his belly, touched his chin, then raised his head a little and looked up under shadowing brows. "Let's make it fifty-fifty." His voice had no confidence.

Everhard said, "Not fifty million"; and the amount seemed so trivial that there was no particular emphasis in his tone. Grandpa sagged down on himself, but glared like a crippled snake.

Everhard heard the flop-flop of slippers and pulled open the door.

Vilette, with a cloud of loose deep-blue silk about her for a dressing-gown, came in, pulling the silk out of the way of her feet as she stepped over the combing. "What is it?" she asked and gave him a quick look, then turned, following the flip of his hand toward the bed. Her hair was neatly drawn about her head.

"You would take time to look pretty, wouldn't you!"

"Never waste my time in useless effort," she said carelessly, stepping by him.

"I'm the one boy who knows you don't!" said Everhard. "Look at him carefully, Cluckee. One of the finest specimens in captivity. Worth money. A New York zoo wants him."

Vilette turned toward Everhard curiously. "Have you been drinking?"

"There's one way to find out," he suggested. She shrugged her shoulder, smiling, and shook her head.

"The captain's coming to pat us on the head," Everhard told her. "Be here any minute."

Vilette drew the blue silk about her, looked around the state-room, and moved to the mirror. She bent forward, studying her nose, picked up the shaving talcum, sniffed it, and wrinkled her nose in disapproval, but sprinkled a little on her fingers and rubbed the nose.

"The captain'll think you're a pretty girl."

She smiled at him in the mirror, not answering. She opened a drawer and took out a handkerchief, rubbed her hands, dusted the powder from the blue robe, and poked the handkerchief into a little laundry-bag.

"Good memory you've got," he said, amused.

Her lifted eyebrows hovered inquiringly.

"You've been in my room just once, furtively, a week ago. Remembered the handkerchiefs."

"We are trained well, we daughters of—" she tossed her palms upward—"Death!"

"He belongs too, Cluckee."

"He! Of them!" She spun about with lithe quick twist of body, sinuously alert, and peered like a watcher in the dark at a coming enemy. Everhard could not see her eyes. He could see Grandpa's. They stared, snake-wicked, at the girl, then blinked, fell, rose again, and again dropped. There was something about her eyes that made him flinch. She turned, demanding in French, "Who is he?" The dark fever glow in her eyes was like a warning of death.

"Take it easy, Cluckee. He's all through. But *now*, you little liar, I do know you were bluffing."

"Who is he?" She was intense, demanding; as changed as a sword seems changed when it is drawn from the sheath.

The steps of a solid man hurrying unhurriedly sounded in the corridor. The captain bulked in the doorway. He was big, not tall but broad, with full muscular face. His eyes, deep under weather-wrinkles, were the color of an iceberg. He stopped outside the combing, looked in, watched Vilette for a moment, and eyed Everhard questioningly; then stepped inside to follow Everhard's gesture and so saw the man slumped on the bed.

"What is all this, Mr. Burnett?" His voice was heavy, slow, solid; a voice to be calm during collision, fire, shipwreck.

Everhard pushed the door to. "James of Washington will confirm what I tell you."



The man on the bed made a curious sound, a sort of low howl, and hunched himself forward with the look of a trapped animal.

At the mention of James, the captain's cold blue eyes lost a shade of their ice-bright light. He took his polished cap brim into his left hand and put his right hand on the foot-rail of the bed, standing ready to turn and look at the man as soon as he had heard a little more.

"Miss Laramie spotted him the first day out. So the biggest cut in the reward goes to her."

Vilette's gasp was soft and doubtful, incredulous. The captain's eyes moved toward her. He was cautious, and not quite sure, distrusting that blue dressing-gown in Everhard's room at 2 A.M.

"She gave me the tip, knowing I've handled a thing or two under James. You got his message?"

"Yes." The captain was non-committal.

"I promoted that vaudeville fight to-day on deck, and nailed the old boy's cushion. Took out a quarter of a million dollars." The captain's cold eyes flickered, and he gave the man on the bed a long look. Everhard went on: "It's in a pillow-case in the purser's safe. Miss Laramie has the ticket."

The captain's eyes moved approvingly toward Vilette.

"The old boy there guessed I'd ribbed him, and came in here to-night for a show-down. We had it. There he is."

"Ah," said the captain. "Excellent."

"Her name can't be used. Neither can mine. So you take all the credit. And hang on to it with both hands. Don't let that swarm of New York reporters pry anything loose when you get back. James gave you the tip. That's your story, so make it stick. Otherwise you spoil the job Miss Laramie and I are on over here." Everhard continued rapidly: "James'll see that the reward is quietly split, three ways. Fifty to Miss Laramie. You and I halve the other fifty. As for the woman he's traveling with, she's probably some small-town widow he picked up for

camouflage, and meant to ditch in Europe. But take her back, too."

"But who is he?" the captain asked, showing interest.

"Hell, Captain! Shave off the itchy crop of whiskers in your eye-picture and remember the 'wanted' posters. Look at his left hand. I never saw him before we met here on shipboard, but I've seen his picture by the greatest artist that ever took a dirty crook to pieces and showed you his insides. This is that New York broker Wattison. His dead body would poison maggots."

## 4

All of the next morning Everhard was alone with Wattison, digging into him with persistent questions, and remaining good-natured about it. Wattison cursed him until with his own repetition he bored even himself, then turned sullen. He would tell nothing, say nothing printable. A leech is a changeable-minded little piece of vermin, lacking stability of purpose, compared with Everhard.

"Wattison, the thing that licked you was the picture in that ring. Who did it?"

Wattison's right arm was in splints and a sling. With his left hand he scratched claw-like at his bearded shrunken cheeks, and mumbled irritably, "I wish to hell I knew!"

"Didn't you pose for it?"

Wattison stirred as if chilled, turned his head, and gazed blankly at the fog-smeared port. He moved his left hand and stared at the nubbin of a little finger. He mumbled wearily, like a tired man talking in his sleep:

"In Paris . . . taken blindfolded to a room. Saw nothing. Did nothing. Just sat there. Christ! it got you! Got me . . . get anybody. I knew that ring was a jinx. But couldn't ditch it. A goddamned devil's passport. You'd get orders to go somewhere and wait. You'd wait. Somebody'd come. Look at the ring, then at the picture. You'd



go with him. Blindfolded. Then you'd sit in a room. Somebody you couldn't see would talk to you. Tell you what to do—"

Wattison broke off abruptly, raised angry eyes, cursing himself, adding: "If I ever do talk to anybody, it won't be to you, you ——. Get out, can't you—damn you! Leave me alone!" He would say nothing more.

All the afternoon Everhard worked at a long message, putting it into cipher, giving James the details, telling him about Vilette Laramie, and asking questions about her. He was so busy that he did not even go on deck during the hour or so that the *Trivilia* stopped at Plymouth.

That night at dinner he found that not only had the cute little Mr. and Mrs. Kewpie left the ship, but Vilette was gone too.

The radio operator apologetically explained that he had not been on duty, so how could he know that Miss Laramie had received a message telling her to leave the ship at Plymouth!

Everhard wandered about the deck like a lonesome pup. No fat little Kewpies, no mysterious Grandpa, no dark-eyed, enigmatic young woman to play with. About all that were left were the fat youth who wore rattlesnake golf stockings and others like him; so Everhard let himself be persuaded into a poker game and had some of what is called beginner's luck.

## Chapter Seven

### 1

**T**HE *Trivilia* glided past the low sand-dunes into Cherbourg, then went on and as usual picked out a foggy morning in which to crawl through the ditch that led to Antwerp.

A word about passports. Everhard, having three, had to know something about them. For all the assumed severity of inspection, they are laxly managed in some places. All of his were visaed for England, Spain, Italy, and Germany, so that if he did have to run from Paris he could jump at the nearest frontier. Enter France in any other way than through Belgium and your passport is messed up with an inky stamp that tells when and where you did it. Spoils the nice clean look of the page, and may spoil the story you would like to tell later on. You may enter Belgium if the passport is visaed by a French consul. No stamp. You may go from Belgium into France, at least on the train, and though an inspector looks at the passport, the chances are ten to one he will not stamp it. Everhard was taking the way of getting into France that would make it seem quite all right not to have his passports marked with entry records.

At Antwerp, he took the first train for Brussels, dropped the rubber tip from his cane out of the window, removed his shoe and threw away the split pea. He was no longer a cripple.

Brussels calls herself the little Paris, but is no more like Paris than a strong-hearted, broad-breasted, rather grave woman is like a slim Parisienne who has sorrows and courage too, but chatters gaily and laughs—conceal-



ing both the pain and the bravery with which she hides it.

In Brussels he took a hotel room for an hour, changed clothes, getting back into a neat double-breasted suit. He put the Robert Burnett passport well out of sight, and caught the first afternoon train for Paris, traveling as McDonald Richmond of San Francisco; occupation, "Capitalist."

He got to Paris after dark, went straight to a hotel, filled out the police slip, and so to bed.

## 2

The next morning a "Paris Herald" reporter came in with the maid when she brought coffee and rolls. His paper had a tip that Don Richmond, alias Everhard, the big shot of the Pacific hijackers, having ducked out of America, was at this hotel. He couldn't—or wouldn't—say from where came the tip.

"Me a hijacker? Bunk!" said Everhard. "Have some coffee?" He dunked a roll, explaining apologetically to the reporter: "Have to find some way to get this coffee down without drinking it. It's a brew of chicory, tannin, and old shoe leather—or tastes like it."

"But wouldn't you say the story was bunk, even if it wasn't?" asked the reporter, shrewdly.

"Bunk," said Everhard.

That is about all he would say. The "Herald" copied from American papers, giving the hijacker story; the French, for once, turned tables and copied from the "Herald." Correspondents and reporters came running. Everhard said, "Bunk. I'm here to rest."

Reporters hustled to interview officials. As Everhard had no felony record, and there was no warrant for him in the States, nobody would say that he was likely to be asked to leave the country. So he was left to do as he pleased—as long as he didn't throw paper in the gutter. A nice brush-lipped red-faced papa of the *agents de police*, with straight sword at his side, had taken Everhard as

a child by the ear and gently led him along the Rue de Rivoli curbing, pointing out discarded scraps of paper for him to pick up. Everhard had never forgotten that lesson.

## 3

That same morning, right on the heels of the "Herald" reporter, a member of the Sûreté—the detective bureau—called. Monsieur Biradou. He came alone. A little slim, trim man with neat square-cut black beard, and shoulders like a bantam drill-sergeant. He had black eyes that made Everhard think of graphlex lenses. Click, click, click, here and there.

Everhard did not like him. Monsieur Biradou did not seem to care. He whipped questions, now in better English than Everhard's, now in crisp vernacular French, as if wanting to see how well Everhard could lie in both tongues. Those clicking eyes took snap-shots of Everhard's face from all angles.

Monsieur Biradou oddly intimated that it would be ever so much easier to permit Monsieur Richmond to remain undisturbed in Paris if a little money was forthcoming. Everhard pretended not to understand; but thought: "You can go to the devil. You may be a grafter and you may not. But the minute I offer you money, you'll know I'm afraid of you—and afraid only because I have something to hide. I've got a hell of a lot to hide; but I'll be damned if I admit it. I'm standing pat."

Monsieur Biradou went away as abruptly as he had come. Everhard took the deepest breath on record—his record, anyhow—and said to himself: "Did I get by? Or is he really as smart as he looks?"

## 4

The racketeer story stirred up the sucker-catchers of Paris, male and female, to put on their best clothes,



lie in wait for Everhard, and try tricks; so a day or two later he bobbed almost furtively into a subleased apartment that an agent turned up.

It was three times bigger than he needed, but very pleasant, being on the quiet Île Saint Louis, taking in the third floor of an old four-story mansion. The front windows were over the Seine and gave a view of the heights of Mont de Paris, where a tangle of narrow old crooked streets encircle the Panthéon with labyrinthine maze. Crooked old streets where François Villon loitered thievishly; the Panthéon, where France buries her glorious dead and would now bury Villon too if his poor bones, so often bruised by the law's men, could be found.

Everhard knew the concierge had to turn in a report of his tenancy. Therefore the police, and those who had influence with the police, would know where to look for him; but he had dodged away from a lot of highly colored come-on men, top-hatted pimps, their bediademed silken sisters, and such sort of bad fish as were not in any way associated with Monsieur X. or La Tête de Mort, but who, merely on their own, were trying to exchange Everhard's diamonds for pawn tickets. It happened that Everhard never wore diamonds or jewelry of any kind except watch, studs, and links. Rings and such truck interfere with card-playing, quick gun-work, and may give the impression that you are a gambler, crook, or—worse—an easy mark.

He was too cautious to advertise for a man to take care of his apartment. He read the situations-wanted ads and picked one Georges. Two days later Georges's mother died and he went away.

The fat wife of the little concierge suggested her cousin, a woman, as Everhard's housekeeper.

"Her age, madame?"

"That of discretion, monsieur—forty."

"Widow?"

"Mademoiselle, monsieur."

"Ah, madame, but your cousin wouldn't like it here. Men seem peculiar to a woman of forty who has never been married."

Everhard then brought one Charles into his apartment and the scamp vanished twenty-four hours later, taking nothing but leaving no notice.

That was irritating. Madame the concierge again suggested her cousin, but Everhard said, "No. I thank you, but I must have a man." He selected an Italian, one Pietro, who disappeared hastily, saying, "There is a little matter that I do not care to explain to the police, monsieur."

The following morning Everhard heard mysterious sounds in the kitchen, but smelled coffee. "Ah," he thought, "one of my wandering lambs has come back."

His bedroom door opened. In came a strange woman, tall, erect, neat, long-legged, with a gaunt face and bright gray eyes. She radiated energy. Her smile was not bad. Her voice pleasing.

"Good morning, monsieur. I am Mademoiselle Houlette, the concierge's cousin, and here is your breakfast."

Everhard eyed her distrustfully. Forty, all right. But the croissants were hot as toast should be; the butter fresh, the jam currant. Newspapers were under her arm.

"Madame my cousin thought you would not mind until you secured another valet," she explained.

"Thoughtful of madame. You speak English, mademoiselle."

"I am so sorry, but not a word, monsieur. Monsieur's French is beautiful."

"Your side of the family are not shopkeepers and concierges," said Everhard.

"Ah, but since the war, monsieur . . ."

Everhard sipped the coffee, and brightened. He began to talk wages, and to give instructions. She said, "Yes, monsieur," with eager humbleness. She did not frown even when he said he did not like French cookery, because



all the choice dishes had a foundation of wine and liquor, which bit his palate. He admitted that there were American restaurants in Paris, but since they were no better than the restaurants in America, that was reason enough to avoid them.

"As long as you make coffee like this, mademoiselle, I don't care much what else you do."

"Yes, monsieur. My family is very poor. I do so want to please monsieur."

## 5

Days passed. Nothing happened, except that the newspapers kept his name in the air. Curiously sensational despatches from America blackened his already dark reputation. James's press-agents were on the job, building him up as such a fellow the Death's-Headers must take an interest in.

Everhard wandered about, carefully avoiding gambling-clubs, cabarets, and bright lights. He wanted to shun the merely accidental friends of night life, and so feel sure that anybody who made a dead set for him was under orders.

When he had been in Paris about two weeks he did one night join the jam and go to see Isobel de Nevers, who after almost a month's illness had returned to the stage. She wore her peacock finery, gold wig, flaming egrets, and glittered with jewelry. Even from where he sat, far back, the eyelids looked bruised and the face seemed a mask of magnolia blossoms, it was that dead white. She sang naughty French songs. Her voice was nothing much, and a bit strained; but her vivacity and sheer French impudence were amusing.

He thought rather longingly of Vilette with her unrouged but red lips, her silken hair in a simple swirl, and the curious wary, wise look in her dark eyes.

It was just a day or two after he had gone to see the de Nevers that he passed two people on the third-floor

landing of the house where he lived. They were coming down from the floor above. The man was dark, thin, skinny. He looked at Everhard with a moment's intent staring, then glanced aside and kept his eyes averted. The woman was young, softly befurred, with a complexion of burned gold, and looked as if she would like being cuddled, provided the rat-eyed man by her side did not know about it.

As Everhard stepped through the door into the hallway of his apartment, Mademoiselle Houlette came with long-legged stride and hands out to take hat, stick, and top-coat.

"Mademoiselle, who are our upstairs neighbors?"

"They came but two days ago. As yet they have no permanent servants. A woman comes in through the day. Monsieur Guyot has a bad temper and is a wine merchant. His business must be prospering, because Madame Fifi Guyot has many diamonds."

When one is the cousin of the concierge, one learns things about tenants.

From time to time Everhard met the Guyots on stairs and landings, usually together, sometimes alone. Monsieur Guyot had strange hours for a wine merchant. Always he gave Everhard a quick, intent look and turned his head. Always her long lashes beamed star-like in a lingering stare, non-committal but as informative as a furtive whisper.

"Nize babee!" said Everhard to himself, but without interest.

Late one afternoon he met her alone. With downcast searching look she seemed to be studying the stairs, but glanced up and exclaimed: "Oh, monsieur, I have dropped my key! And my husband has gone for a week to England. Often he goes to England and leaves me alone. Oh!" She stooped, stood up, turned, starry-eyed with delight and oozing a perfumed readiness to be cuddled. It was crude, but she meant it to be, so he couldn't help but understand.



And sure enough, there on her little palm was the key. She could not have offered it more plainly with words.

He did not take it and go with her to her door, make sure that it was really the right key, step in for a moment to see if the view from her front windows was as good as his own, and so ease her loneliness. He said easily, bowing, "You are very beautiful, madame. So even if you had not found the key, monsieur the concierge would have been happy to open your door. Good evening, madame."

Everhard went into his apartment, saying amusedly to himself: "You will never know, Fifi Guyot, but I have been kind to you, for when the badger-game trap closes on me, I turn tables and take everything in sight. And your diamonds are genuine. I know, having made a study of diamonds, since they are so often offered as a pledge in poker games."

## *Chapter Eight*

### 1

EVERHARD took his midday walk, sauntering idly above the Opéra, which he thought a grand building inside and out, though it is now considered bad taste to think so; and he came to rest on a little iron-backed chair at a little marble-topped iron-legged table before a café that seemed trying to warm all outdoors with a row of red-bellied braziers before a screen of potted box.

He sipped hot chocolate and watched the people pass.

Everhard loved Paris with all the passion that sheep-voiced crooners feel—or say they do—for the leaky cottage where they were born.

A smoky, chill city in winter; very dirty at all times. Yet bulky muscular women in clattering sabots push water about with long-handled brooms, scouring the streets in the early dawn. Great boulevards are kept free from litter. The rubbish of the morning street fairs is cleaned up quickly. Men and women get down on their knees, winter and summer, to scrub the entrance ways to buildings. Paris is no sloven, though her fair face is smudged with evil-smelling carbons. The shadowy lure of mystery hovers over every building that is not new. Artists find that all the nooks, corners, streets, quays, bridges, and trees of Paris, women too, are such stuff as pictures are made of, and may not be found in like profusion elsewhere in the world. Why it is so, only God, who loves artists and makes them so happy in their poverty and among their failures, can know.

Everhard became aware that a young man at a table



near by was muttering and acting strangely. He had come in unnoticed since Everhard sat down. His clothes were neither new nor shabby. His hands looked a little grimy, though they had been washed. Like the hands of a man who works with grease. He stared under a low felt brim as if watching for some one.

Presently the mutterer said distinctly: "That is he! Ha! I have luck. He is coming to a table."

Everhard glanced aside and saw that the mad mutterer had his eyes on a tall leisurely man who was looking about for a table. When the man drew near, the mutterer stood up with a cry and drew a gun. Everhard made a scrambling reach, knocking over chairs, and struck up the fellow's arm. The gun was discharged high in the air. A moment's writhing tussle and shrill cries, a flutter of grasping hands, then arms tightly wrapped the lunatic. An excited crowd swarmed close, talking shrilly. The sidewalk began to empty itself in upon the café entrance.

Everhard was pushing back out of the way, feeling quickly for change to leave beside his plate, when a hand touched him. The tall boulevardier said in English: "Come, let us get out of this together. A hasty 'thank you' is not to be thought of. That fellow is crazy."

They climbed through a box of clipped shrubbery near the wall and pressed against the crowd. Everhard was pushed slightly and half turned to see a little old tramp of a man coming too. At that moment the crowd opened a bit and Everhard hurried at the heels of the tall boulevardier.

Horns were blowing; autos were stalled in the streets with drivers standing up, trying to see. The *agents* made their whistles scream and flourished their hands commandingly. The excitement brought more people. The *agents* pushed like football players. Rumor ran with shrill cries through the crowd, and was caught up and echoed as fact.

At the turning of a side street, well out of the jam, the boulevardier stopped and put out his hand. "I thank you.

No doubt of it, you saved my life. That madman is a chauffeur who was turned off because he acted queerly. Now I shall arrange for him to be sent to an asylum and have proper care. My name is Hovenden."

At that moment some one brushed against Everhard. It was again the little old beardless tramp of a man in a floppy cap. He had the canvas bag at his side, the pin-pointed cane, the face-down look, of one who gathers cigar and cigarette butts out of the gutter and about the chairs of the cafés. He even has a name that sounds well if you don't know what it means—*trimadeur*. Now with rare impudence for one of his humble caste, he said, "*Se gardez, monsieur!*" as he stabbed at the pavement close by Hovenden's foot, whisked the pin-tipped cane through down-reaching hand, passed the hand at his bag, and went shuffling on along the sidewalk's edge, peering into the gutter.

"I'm damned!" said Hovenden, fingering a large thin circular watch charm. "A gutter-picker is polite enough to say, 'Look out for yourself,' when he stabs close to one's foot!"

Everhard looked thoughtfully after the shambling little figure in floppy cap and oversized coat. There had been no *mégat*, no piece of tobacco, near Hovenden's foot.

## 2

A big fellow, this Hovenden, and not fat. Everhard suspected a corset and shoulder pads. Rather dark, beloved of tailors and no doubt women. He had black eyes, with a hazy look in them. He had a deep, rich voice, and was proud of it. Everhard gave him a going over that was thorough, and distrusted his man-of-the-world air. A handsome man—if you weren't a poker-player who had made a study of faces. Besides, "*Se gardez!*" echoed in Everhard's ears.

Everhard gave his name simply as "Mr. Richmond," adding, "I haven't been in Paris long."



This Hovenden had the air of an aristocrat, an affected elegance, as if he rather expected people to be proud of his condescension and affability. Everhard was blankly studious, and receptive.

Hovenden said that he was on his way to the club, the Horse Shoe. He glanced keenly at Everhard's face and saw nothing but mild interest.

"Sporting club. Pleasant place to idle," said Hovenden. His fingers toyed with the dangling watch charm. "I walk this way frequently. Exercise, you know. Stop for an *apéritif*. The chauffeur knew. By the way, come along to the club and have lunch with me."

"A pleasure," said Everhard, unimpressed.

## 3

The Horse Shoe Club is upstairs around a corner of the Boulevard des Italiens, a fancy place, very exclusive, and famous. You turn off the street into an inconspicuous entrance, mount the stairs, and a door-man in gray and gilt bows low, speaks welcomingly in a low voice, and swings wide the door—if you are with Hovenden.

Everhard and his host entered a small room where a fox-faced fellow sat at a desk, fingering accounts. He arose to make his bow to Hovenden, murmuring humbly. A page eagerly took hats, sticks, coats, and scarfs, and carried them to a sleek cosmetic brunette who, if you didn't mind the paint, was very pretty. The gray carpet had a pile that made one think of walking in soft snow. There did not seem to be any windows.

They went into the lounge. Massive chairs of red leather bulked near little tables. A man in gray uniform, without gilt, wandered about with dust-pan and broom, scraping up ashes, emptying trays, and pretending that he never looked at any one. Paintings, mostly of somebody at the bath, hung in wide gilt frames. There weren't many people about at this hour of the day, but such as

were greeted Hovenden with deference, bowing and lifting hands at a distance.

A greasy, dark, fat man, with bulky shoulders, curly hair, and dark droopy eyes, came with a quick waddle toward Hovenden. He carried a freshly lighted thick cigar, and bowed as if not presuming to offer his hand.

In a guttural friendly tone he asked, "How are you, Prince?"

"Oh yeah?" said Everhard to himself and looked hard at the fat greasy man, somehow not disliking him. The fellow had the beautiful eyes of an English setter, and there was nothing slack and weak about his thick-lipped mouth.

In various poker joints, usually in New York, Everhard had been introduced to "Mr. Morgan," to "Mr. Whitney," and once even to a "Mr. Mellon"—a slender, pleasant, kindly, slightly gray gentleman who (so a confidential whisper informed Everhard) was quietly seeking a little relaxation. Much to his amazement he had relaxed his hold on some twenty thousand dollars when Everhard got through with him, and would have made a fuss but Everhard jerked up Mr. Mellon's coat sleeve, disclosed a hold-out, and asked if that was really a nice thing for a man who tried to look like the Secretary of the Treasury to wear among friends.

"I must look an awful boob to some people," thought Everhard. "It must be my untroubled conscience that shows on my face and is mistaken for innocence."

Prince Hovenden seemed a little impatient that the greasy man should approach him, and as he went away, said: "That is Nick Dodalus. Tobacco merchant. Terrific gambler. He and Charles Birk Kurlingen fight it out here at times with specially starred gold chips. What are you drinking, Mr. Richmond?"

"Vichy."

"No cocktail?"

"Weak heart."



"Ah? Sorry to hear it."

"Very bad at times," said Everhard.

He reflected that they might put a "prince" over on him, since his was an unsuspicious nature, but they couldn't run in a phony Charles Birk Kurlingen. He once had really saved Kurlingen's life by emptying a glass of ginger-ale into the eyes of a man that wanted to shoot him. Kurlingen, a fool for plunging, had played square in the game; so Everhard felt it necessary to do a little something to quiet the bad loser. Everhard doubted if Kurlingen ever cheated at cards. For one thing he was a rotten coward; for another, being a great financier, he knew so many ways of cheating the public that he could afford to play the cards as they came.

"Kurlingen is in England now," said Hovenden, sipping something pink out of a tall slender glass, "but comes here often."

He showed Everhard through the club rooms, which were quite extensive and very luxurious. He introduced him to two or three persons as "Mr. Richmond," and said nothing about the mad chauffeur. People seemed to think that Everhard was being very much honored by Hovenden's interest.

After lunch Hovenden took Everhard to the secretary, who looked like an elder brother of the fox-faced man in the anteroom, and had a guest card issued. Hovenden also rather urgently suggested that Everhard be his guest soon at a little party-trip through the cafés. Must do what he could, he said, to make Mr. Richmond's stay in Paris pleasant.

4

The next morning Everhard sat up in bed sipping Mademoiselle Houlette's excellent coffee and fingering the newspapers: the Paris "Herald," "Le Matin," "Le Figaro," and so read three times that a discharged chauffeur, in a café on the Boulevard Haussmann, had at-

tempted the life of Prince Henri de Rougemont Hovenden El Kasyd. Waiters and bystanders had overpowered the maniac.

Everhard grunted, meditatively, and scratched the side of his nose, then pulled at an ear-lobe and reread the items. He absently put into his mouth a piece of bread, butter, and jam, and forgot to chew.

When Mademoiselle Houlette, stirring her shapeless skirts with long-legged stride, came for the tray, he asked, "Ever hear of this Prince Henri de Rougemont Hovenden El Kasyd?"

Mademoiselle Houlette gazed studiously into space and shook her head. "Monsieur must remember that I have not lived long in Paris. But my cousin—I can inquire of her. She knows every one. I go at once, monsieur."

She turned, radiating energy as a diamond casts off sparkles; and soon returned with brightened eyes.

"Ha, monsieur! My cousin says that he is the son of old Prince Fered El Kasyd, who almost became King of Egypt, but the English—no no! they would not permit. It would have been a great thing for France, but those English, monsieur . . ."

As soon as old Prince Fered, dead these twenty years, was named as the father of the present El Kasyd, Everhard began to remember things. Terrible stories had been told of old Fered. Everhard, a child, lifted above the crowd on the shoulders of Papa Brule, in whose family of pretty children he had been left to learn French—and good manners—had once seen the famous carriage, drawn by four black horses at a gallop; and he had had a hasty glimpse of a gray beard, hooked nose, vulture-like keen eyes, and a wasted body sitting bolt upright. It was said that behind the ancient stone walls of Prince Fered's house, which was within two stone-throws downhill from St. Etienne, and so not far from Notre Dame, the old prince and his fellahs did terribly cruel things because he could get pleasure in no other way.



The French foreign office, until the day of his death, had hopes that some coup would make him King of Egypt, and so vastly increase French influence in northern Africa. The El Kasyds were a mixed breed of bad blue-bloods, and for a hundred years had been marrying among European nobility.

"Your cousin did not mention, mademoiselle, that the present prince, who calls himself Hovenden, is hard up?"

"No, monsieur."

"I may have heard some place, or dreamed it, that he was so impoverished that he had taken over an interest in a fashionable gambling-club."

On the way out, shortly before noon, Everhard met Madame Thurot, the concierge, at the cobbled courtyard entrance. She was as fat as a barrel, but there was nothing of the sloven about her; and if your tips were as they should be, she loved you. Her tongue clacked a cheery greeting.

"By the way, madame, have you ever heard that the present Prince el Kasyd has pawned the family jewels?"

"*Fichtre!* How I hope so! One doesn't hear of that devil's family now as when old Fered was alive. You are the first to mention his name in, ah—" her fat arms tossed her palms upward—"years!"

"So?"

"It is so, monsieur. Ha, what a family! Well, well. I had not thought of old Fered since that beast Landru had his head chopped off for killing so many of us poor women. If the truth were known, old Fered—I but tell what I have heard!—killed hundreds in that ancient house of his, and died of old age."

Everhard strolled toward Notre Dame, clicking the pavement with his cane's tip to punctuate his speculations concerning Mademoiselle Houlette—why she must first inquire of her cousin the concierge before speaking of Hovenden. "Is it because she wants me to think she is stupid and knows nothing? Hm? I may not even trust

one who makes such excellent coffee and itemizes every centime of her marketing accounts, eh?"

He took a sizable and carefully sealed square envelop from his pocket and examined the seal on the flap. This was stamped, addressed, all ready for mailing at an instant's notice, and contained the two extra passports. The seal had not been touched. "I shall sleep with it under my pillow from now on," he assured himself. "And perhaps I can have a dream that will explain why my three men-servants all so quickly disappeared to give the attentive Mademoiselle Houlette the opportunity of living with me."



## Chapter Nine

### 1

EVERHARD thought that it was up to him to loaf about in the Horse Shoe Club and let Hovenden, and such others as had been concerned in the little frame-up of the mad chauffeur, look him over. They took their time about it. Everhard was supposed to be a big racketeer. On the other hand, any one who inquired closely into his record would have learned that in his time he had hurt a good many men, all of them crooks, some of whom wore tall silk hats at night—like Hovenden's.

Hovenden had taken him out at night, visiting queer places and mingling with lovely ladies. But when it came to women—and cards—Everhard picked his own. He wouldn't play with those that a man he distrusted ran in on him. He would not drink. He would not talk of himself. Hovenden seemed slightly irritated.

Everhard would not even play poker. He had looked the Horse Shoe Club over carefully, and with some reluctance decided that it did appear to be a genuine private club which tried to keep out sharpers and give rich men a chance to go the limit. Of course the management had to be on the lookout for smart boys who posed well and got in. Nobody had invited Everhard to play; yet he had the feeling that he was being watched; and rather guessed that Hovenden—or somebody—thought it would be nice to catch him cheating and so have something on him; perhaps put him to work at the card-tables and demand that he divide the profits. Everhard was on to the queer tricks of most shady games.

From ten days to two weeks went by. Everhard idled about the club, looking on. He, a good judge in matters of the kind, thought the poker games were on the square. He did monkey a little with a roulette wheel just to pay for the wear and tear on the club's big red-leather chairs. Otherwise he stood pat, waiting. Waiting for somebody else to make the next move.

## 2

Meanwhile Everhard had become rather well acquainted with Nick Dodalus, the swart, greasy, bejeweled Greek, who wanted to be friendly. Dodalus, who seemed unpopular in the club, was indeed a terrific gambler. One reason the club seemed honest was because nobody trimmed Dodalus, who would play two pair like four of a kind, and if he had three in a row would somehow get over the impression that he was bluffing. Everhard, watchful and critically approving, felt kindly toward the Greek. He played poker! With his limpid dark eyes, like a dog's, he was as eager as a lonely dog to be liked by gentlemen. Many of the gentlemen would hardly speak to him, unless making a night of it in a rowdy place. Then they would pat him on the back just before the bill came and say, "You're a great fellow, Nick." But Hovenden did not play poker or go to rowdy places.

One evening Dodalus waved his big freshly lit cigar near Everhard's face, showing off the bediamonded flash of his fingers, rocked back on his heels and inquired: "Do you ever play poker? There's a game in the room over here, and the boys want it six-handed."

He had a muddled accent, though a ready tongue. His greasy curls glistened and his heavily lidded eyes were bright. A wrestler's shoulders held up his big head. Some little quirk of unnatural excitement, a strained casualness, made him seem a bit uncomfortable.

Everhard glanced piercingly into the Greek's sad, lonely eyes. "Thanks. Are you playing?"



"Me, no. I'm going to a show. But I'll introduce you."

They waded noiselessly through the thick pile of carpet and entered a private room.

Five men were at the table. Everhard did not recall having seen any of them about the club before. They stood up. Introductions passed, hand-shakes, affable words. Three Americans, one Russian, and a Turk. The Turk and the Russian were wearing greenish-blue glasses. At a glance Everhard recognized the type, knew what he was in for. He had not expected this sort of thing in the Horse Shoe, certainly not from Dodalus. Everhard made it a point to try always to be ready for anything in the way of crooked poker. He gave the greenish-blue glasses a passing glance and was content. In sitting down he adjusted his coat to ease the outline of the shoulder holster. He was carrying only one gun at the time.

The Turk was banking. "I've got a dead horse to work off. Don't feel lucky," said he. "But you've got to get the streak of bad luck out of your system. Sooner the quicker."

"Hell! look at me!" said one of the Americans. "Dropped a hundred thousand last night. Two hands. One of 'em a full house. The other was a blazer."

"What about the jinx I've been carrying!" demanded another American.

Everhard drew his wallet, indifferently letting them see that it was bulky with big notes. He handed the Turk a ten-thousand-franc note and received a pile of chips. He was offered the deal, but passed it.

Nick Dodalus threw away his cigar and lighted another. He liked having big fresh cigars in his mouth. He glanced at his watch, and put his polished foot on a chair's rung, pausing to look on for a hand or two.

Everhard, ignoring the dealer, caught Dodalus's eyes. The Greek's lingered for a moment, then dropped thoughtfully to the tip of his cigar, glowing like the ruby in his necktie. Dodalus took a deep breath, drew a big silk handkerchief, scattering perfume from its folds, scrubbingly

mopped his forehead. He poked the handkerchief into his outside breast pocket, leaving it to overflow like something spilt. Sweat continued to break out on the big greasy face.

Nimble fingers to the left of Everhard shuffled, offered the cut, got it, and dealt. Everhard let his cards lie untouched. Other men picked up their cards and began sorting.

"You know, it is a little hard on the eyes, this light," said Everhard, glancing overhead. He reached into an inside coat pocket.

Dodalus, slowly blowing smoke, suddenly jerked his foot from the chair and puffed as if struck full in the stomach. Five men staringly held their breath as Everhard, with a preoccupied air, took out a pair of greenish-blue glasses, wiped the lenses carefully, and hooked them over his ears. Not a man at the table moved. Frozen, they sat in startled attitudes. Dodalus drew deeply on his big cigar. No flicker crossed his heavily lidded eyes.

Everhard did not pick up his cards. He left them face down, spreading them with quick little touches and, since their backs were plainly marked with gambler's ink that any one with special glasses could read, he sorted a pair of sevens and with no glance at the face of the cards, tossed the discards aside.

The tin horns sneaked bewildered glances at one another. One fellow cleared his throat. Everhard removed the glasses and looked at him attentively. The fellow changed his mind and said nothing. The Turk slowly took off his glasses and with a kind of furtive slowness put them into a side pocket. Another man dropped his cigarette with startled fling. It had smoldered down to his fingers. The Turk twisted about and gave Dodalus a look that yelled for help.

Everhard stood up. With backward heave of leg he moved the heavy chair. The finger-tips of his left hand were lightly on the table. His right hand hovered breast-high, as yet not with menace but poised within a half-



second's reach of the automatic. His voice was quiet; his words had no particular emphasis: "Pay me. Sixty thousand francs."

Dodalus laughed nervously, eying the baffled gamblers. Leaning far over, with laboring reach of fat body, he opened the door. Then facing them, he gave his arm a backhanded sweep: "Get out, you, all you! I'll settle with Mr. Richmond." His accent was more muddled than ever. Sweat ran and dripped like raindrops.

The gamblers gave one another furtive questioning glances, but stood up, pushing half-heartedly at their chairs.

"You heard me." Everhard's look nailed the Turk banker. "Leave sixty thousand francs on this table. I'd take your shirt too, but there's some kinds of stink a laundry can't get out."

Dodalus's deep voice was humbly coaxing: "I'll settle with you, Mr. Richmond."

"Right. But when I win, I collect. From everybody in the game."

The Turk fellow uneasily paused, eying Everhard. Then he reached into his pocket, flung a handful of crumpled notes at the table, jerked himself about as if in a huff, and started to follow the others.

Everhard halted him with, "Wait till I count this money." The Turk stopped, glaring at Dodalus, who made a little deprecating gesture with the cigar.

"Get out," said Everhard. The Turk went. Dodalus gave the door a swing, slamming it to.

Everhard smoothed the notes, carefully folding them. Dodalus opened his mouth and closed it without a sound. Everhard did not look at him, being busy with the notes. Dodalus threw away the cigar and, mopping his face and neck with a handful of wadded silk, walked to the other side of the table. Facing across it, he said: "I've been an ass. Name your price."

Everhard looked him over, eyed the ruby in the necktie.

His eyes wandered about Dodalus's fingers. Fine diamonds. His glance lifted to Dodalus's eyes, dog-like, limpid. Fine eyes. Everhard said nothing. He had a way of saying nothing most uncomfortably.

"Honest to God, Mr. Richmond, I'd have repaid what you lost!"

"Never heard that one before."

"You see . . . honest, Mr. Richmond . . . it . . . it was a kind of joke," Dodalus grunted unhappily.

"Why try to frame me with parlor magic?"

Dodalus's muddled accent became very like a stammer. "I'd heard about you . . . heard you was Don Everhard. Somehow you don't look it . . . didn't till you called the show-down. I was curious . . . curious to see what you'd do against a bunch like that."

"You . . . and who else were curious?"

"Oh, nobody! Just me."

"You're a liar."

"Any amount you say, Mr. Richmond."

Everhard's wrist moved slightly. A finger pointed with casual directness at the Greek's face. "I've watched your play, Dodalus. You're a thoroughbred—at poker. I know damn well you didn't frame me for any share in a six-way split. Who put you up to it?"

"Nobody."

"All right. Then I'll take you and these cards to the secretary. You'll be kicked out of this club. Be barred from all clubs that bar crooks. So come across, Nick, and I'll never peep. Otherwise . . ." He began gathering in the cards with deft loose-fingered quickness.

Dodalus puffed, gasping. Sweat glistened like grease on his dark face. Beggingly: "He didn't mean a thing wrong, Mr. Richmond! He just said: 'Nick, let's find out if this Mr. Richmond is who we think, and see what he can do. You fix it up, Nick. Get some of the Turk's gang up here, on the quiet. Let's see what happens.' So I done that, Mr. Richmond. I'd have paid you back."



"Who is he?"

"He's really a good friend of yours, Mr. Richmond. But I promised I'd never tell. So if you take them cards to the secretary . . . I'll get kicked out, all right, but I won't tell."

"Are you sure the prince is really a friend of mine, Nick?"

"God! don't let 'im know I told!"

"Hell, no." Everhard laughed.

Dodalus took Everhard's hand into both his own to shake it.

### 3

Dodalus, like a lonely dog that has found a good friend, became Everhard's shadow. It distressed him that Everhard would not smoke his big, rich, specially made cigars, would not touch the fine though rather heavy wines of exclusive lists, would not eat the sort of food that cost a lot, or play with his girl friends. Dodalus had a mess of them, too.

Everhard would not even play poker with him. He was afraid that if Dodalus was bumped repeatedly on some of those big pots that he forced before he would show his cards, there might be a lurking bit of suspicion that something had been slipped over on him.

"Wait till Kurlingen comes back to Paris, Nick. He'll trim you."

"Him? Not him! But he's no fun, though." Dodalus grunted, eying a fresh cigar's crimson tip.

Everhard nodded vaguely, with perfect understanding. Kurlingen was another who splashed money, hopeful that gentlemen would admiringly take notice.

Dodalus had bad table manners and no relatives. But, unlike Kurlingen, he wasn't a rotter. Dodalus had big interests in the Near East tobacco markets, particularly in Egypt. Men bled him. Women bled him. Beggars bled

him. He did not care. He got a great thrill in walking about the streets at night and suddenly shoving franc notes into the fingers of some sad-looking workingman, broken old woman, dejected street girl, and watching the amazed glow of delight on pinched faces. "I want that everybody look happy," he said in his muddled accent. "To do that—" he patted his belly—"it is better than a cocktail for a nice warm feeling."

Also Dodalus insisted: "I know damn well a fellow like you, he don't go lonesome about Paris at night. You won't like my girls. Let me see yours."

## 4

Everhard, one night wandering into an American bar that was run by an Englishman and his French wife on the Rue Pigalle, bought two girls a drink, then became interested in the smile of one. They were English chorus-girls. At this time English chorus dancers were popular in Paris. It is said—but don't ask me to prove it!—that French girls, as a chorus, simply cannot be drilled to keep an acrobatic rhythm; and following a recent big hit at the Folies-Bergère, other theaters had brought in English girls.

Everhard, having bought the drink, suggested going to the Monk's Cellar for something to eat. One girl said, "Oh, jolly!" but the other, whose smile was interesting, said: "No. They rob you there." That was an odd remark from a maiden on the Rue Pigalle at midnight. He, inquisitive and suspicious, wondered if it was genuine and experimented. Nora—though her name was Irish, she was thoroughly English—showed that it was, for she refused champagne, picked out inexpensive dishes, and fussed mildly if the tip was excessive. Her companion, Betty, a curly-haired brunette, was not actively greedy, but took whatever was offered and said thank you very nicely.

Everhard had got into the way of dropping into the bar



after the show because they were amusing, needed at least one good meal a day, and he knew that they had not been planted on him. And it was something of a novelty to see a chorus-girl trying to save money for the man who spent it. Of course, if Nora ever got into the front row of the chorus she might have other ideas. But even that promotion was unlikely, since she drank too much, though without getting very woozy, and kept too outlandish hours for her youth and sweet English-girlhood look to last very long. Besides, the evenings were wintry and they went more than half naked in a draft at the theater. Girl after girl from the chorus went to the hospital with pneumonia and never came back. Nora and Betty each got what amounted to about twelve dollars a week. Naturally they were glad to have somebody buy drinks that cost forty cents each; but Nora conveyed in entire friendliness, with a charming smile, that you weren't buying anything else. Betty was different, and wore a for-sale sign on her pretty face. The price wasn't high.

Everhard made Dodalus put his jewelry out of sight, turned down his limousine and liveried chauffeur, and took him through the rain, in a taxi, to the Rue Pigalle bar. The bar-room was small but not crowded. Tables were moved so you could get to the seats against the wall, and were pushed back when you were seated. If you went to the toilet you went down a ladder, and if you were too drunk to climb back you were out of luck—not being supposed to get drunk. There were a piano and a fiddler, and you sang if you felt like it. The bar was not bohemian, jazzy, or classy. It was friendly. The waiter seemed as pleased to serve Vichy as champagne; and your pockets weren't picked.

Dodalus, the spender, bulked uncomfortably on his seat and gazed at Everhard reproachfully, asking in silence, "Where's the fun in this?"

Shortly after eleven o'clock a group of the girls came from the theater, rain-splattered and laughing. Two of

them glanced about a little hopefully, saw Everhard's gesture, and came. Dodalus was introduced. Betty was unimpressed by the fat greasy man. She said almost at once: "I have such a headache. Must go home."

"Now, ain't that too bad," said Dodalus. "I was just going to ask can't I send for my car and we'll go to the Tohu-Bohu."

Betty, sipping a poisonous-looking drink, murmured: "I'd love to, but my maid is waiting up. Besides, I think there's a letter for me from the Prince of Wales." The lingering look in her eye as she turned aside showed that she had marked down Dodalus as a peewee four-flusher; and he, uncomfortably jewelless, seemed to have no way of making her realize that he was really a Somebody.

Nora, very quiet to-night, eyed Everhard doubtfully and asked, "Why did you . . ." She put her hand on her breast and made paper crackle. "It came this morning. I was silly and bought some clothes. Though I really did mean to make you take it back."

"How much?"

"Three thousand francs. No note or anything. Of course you did it."

"Let me see the envelop."

She pulled at the collar of her dress and twisted her arm encirclingly within. It was a plain envelop, typewritten, addressed to "Mlle. Nora Blake."

"Not I, fair maiden. Think of somebody whose face you've slapped. He wants to be forgiven."

"Honest, you didn't? It makes me feel queer not to know. Almost afraid. Yet like little fools, Betty and I bought new dresses. Only a little left."

Dodalus, bored and impatient, rose surgingly against the table, making a passage. "I'm going to phone for my car," he said defiantly to Everhard, and hurried out of sight.

Betty, fingering a package of Cravens, lighted another from the one she held, saying: "Now that he's broken my



heart with false promises about the Tohu-Bohu, and left me . . . shall I kill myself now or wait till I get some sleep and feel better?"

Everhard gave each girl a little push. "If advice to young girls is what you really want, go scramble into your party clothes. He's phoning for reservations. And that car."

Their housekeeping rooms—or, rather, room—was in the tenement of a narrow street just around the corner, four stories up and at the rear. When they came down those four gloomy ill-smelling stairs, a grenadier in chauffeur's uniform escorted them under an umbrella from the doorway to a sixteen-thousand-dollar Italian limousine. Dodalus, feeling more himself now that he had fished all of his jewelry out of his pocket and bestudded himself, held a freshly lighted cigar and stood bareheaded in the rain, bowing as if to princesses.

## 5

The Tohu-Bohu was the fashion; and the spendthrifts of gay Paree clustered there. Not just anybody could walk in. The door-man looked you over; a house detective who played that he was the manager and just happened to be in the entrance hall looked you over; the cloak-room girls looked you over; one of the real managers looked you over; the head waiter looked you over, and if you weren't known—or were too well known—everybody would be dreadfully sorry, but every table was taken or reserved. In other words, the management insisted upon having a reasonable assurance that you would spend money and weren't a jewel-thief.

Champagne in ice and silver bucket waited at Nick Dodalus's table. Betty's eyes were as wide and bright as big carbuncles. Nora ran the bluff that all this was nothing new in her young life, and took it in with slow studying glances. Everhard stood his champagne glass on its head and drank ginger-ale out of a high-ball tumbler.

The place was crowded. Half the women there had a wolfish look in spite of their cosmetic glaze, waxy shimmer, jeweled glitter, and gauzy nakedness. When Nora danced they appraisingly eyed her strong young body and envied her smile. With that smile they could have stood any man on his ears and made things fall out of his pocket.

Many people, probably hoping that they could join Dodalus's party and get their bills paid, patted him on the shoulder. One or two men whom Everhard had met before greeted him as "Mr. Richmond." Nora lifted her eyes shyly, without reproach. "Jones," spelled with a "g" to be convincing, was the name he had given her. Women with cat-eyed lingering stares wonderingly appraised Betty, flushed of face, in costume jewelry, and new gown already slightly spotted.

"Having a good time, Nora?"

"Of course."

She wasn't, of course, being conscious of her three hundred francs a week and what it wouldn't buy. A moment later she again mentioned the anonymous money, not happily. "I might as well spend the rest of it now." The waiter spun a twirler in her champagne glass and refilled it from a fresh bottle. She could drink as much as any woman there, and keep her smile. When that went, Nora would be just another girl, wise like the others and better dressed than now.

6

A fluttering change of tempo ran through the Tohu-Bohu and voices fell. The music went on, but laughter was hushed. Dancers twisted their necks, all looking toward the door. Nora caught at Everhard's arm breathlessly, putting down her glass to point unobtrusively with the other hand. "Look!"

Hovenden, tall and—with padded shoulders—broad, was there. Everhard was sure this time that the prince was corseted, though perhaps it was the snug sleekness of the



tailor's fit. His pose was consciously aristocratic. His face was half turned as if he wanted the ladies to see his profile. They weren't looking at him.

Isobel de Nevers was at his side, and seemed almost as tall as he until you looked carefully. A bizarre creature, that woman. You couldn't have guessed her age unless her face was washed. You could not tell whether the white sheen of her face was powder on fresh young skin, or shellac that filled in the wrinkles. It was said that no one had ever seen her by sunlight. A creature of the night but bright lights. She was startling. Her wig of spun gold, plumed with egrets, and the princess-like hauteur of her carriage gave an impression of height.

An ermine cloak lay over her bare shoulders—far back, to let you see how erect they were—and the cloak, open in front, revealed the spangled glitter that danced on the colored gauze mesh of her gown. Jewels blazed at her throat and on her breast, on her fingers, and dangleingly twinkled from her hidden ears. She, impudent and vivacious on the stage, for which she was not known to have had any training at all, was now proudly aloof, even disdainful, as if among unworthy enemies. She must have felt that every one of the wolf-faced women there, and some of the others too, enviously hated her heartlessness and charm that was said to strip men of wealth and send them shivering into suicide.

Everhard hoped that she would make a good job of it with Hovenden, but suspected them of being fish of the same flavor. He had the tip from James's six-months-old magazine to go by, and so knew that this woman was something important in the affairs of La Tête de Mort. Her face, shadowed with wisps of the gold wig, was a dead flat mask-like white; her lips crimson but without mussy lines. A steady hand, her own or her maid's, spread the lip-stick—red as fresh blood. Looked like it, too. Made you think of men whose veins had been drained. She, being wilfully bizarre and fantastic, meant that it should.

Her half-veiled purple-lidded eyes, with vague roving, seemed to gleam unseeingly. She gave one the chills, and yet people had to look. Everhard knew it was all a mask and costume, and wondered what the devil she was like underneath: yet she must be what she seemed, since she chose to look as she did.

Isobel de Nevers stopped and stared as directly at Everhard as if about to shoot. Then, with lift of purple eyelids her glance flashed at Nora, whose hand lay in Everhard's on the table. The look had something so personal, so seemingly meaning, that people also stared at the astonished Nora. The de Nevers moved her crimson lips, as if something amused her. The smile vanished in a flash of low-spoken words as with hand out in a slow gesture she checked Hovenden. She turned away, but with backward lingering glance at Everhard, and the last thing he saw as she faced about was the smile, amused and enigmatic.

Hovenden, posing for the ladies, had not noticed anything, but knew that something was wrong. She was making him take her away. He looked about in puzzled embarrassment, wondering what had happened. He saw Everhard, and bowed quickly, coldly. He refused to see Dodalus, though Dodalus, with Betty, danced almost within arm's length and spoke.

"Nora, confess!" Everhard demanded. "What the devil did you ever steal from her?"

"I don't know—unless it was you." She laughed, a little excited. It wasn't to every one that the de Nevers condescended to give a look of challenge.

Nora's eyes lifted inquiringly to Everhard's face. She did not ask otherwise. English dancing-schools seem to teach that you should never question your gentlemen friends about anything; they would only lie, anyhow.

Everhard said, "Never saw the lady before—except from the gallery."

Many people had noticed the incident. There was



whispering. Fingers were pointed. The whole room was curious. Dodalus came wiping sweat from his face, and Betty breathless.

Everhard explained: "She probably hadn't yet made Hovenden unhappy to-night, and felt it was time for a bubble of prima-donna temperament. Picked on me. Else she's a fortune-teller, and knows that Nora will be crowding her out of the spotlight this time next year!"

They at once left the Tohu-Bohu and started the rounds, popping in and out of all sorts of queer little night cafés. Both girls grew woozy, but Nora became dignified; Betty didn't, and after she put on a show in a place where it wasn't bad taste, Dodalus really became interested in her. They all landed in an upstairs place in the Halles about dawn, and had onion soup and champagne for breakfast. Everhard took a chance with fried eggs and coffee—all bad—and let them go back to be warmed over for some other boob.

An hour later the girls came a bit unsteadily from the sixteen-thousand-dollar Italian car before the doorway of their tenement, and woozily praised the Lord that there was no *matinée* this day. Betty took a wrestling hold on Dodalus's neck to bid him farewell. There was a crinkling sound as her hand closed on what he offered; then the sound of rewarding lips, hazily seeking his mouth—and missing.

Nora put out an unsteady hand and smiled drowsily at Everhard. Her tongue was a bit slow and not quite sure, but the smile deepened. "I don't love you." She waggled her head. "No. Nice man, but I don't. That woman would kill me if I did!"

## Chapter Ten

### 1

**M**ADEMOISELLE HOULETTE, bringing black fragrant coffee, held out a letter that had just come by messenger.

Everhard turned the envelop over and sniffed it. Heavy costly stationery, faintly perfumed. The handwriting was unfamiliar—a woman's. He ripped the envelop and took out a card embossed with a crest. The note was in English.

My dear Mr. Richmond:

Please come this afternoon at five o'clock. Just you and I for tea—alone, unless you wish to bring the charming English girl. You, of course, will not disappoint one who is so anxious to be a friend.

The signature was a temperamental scrawl. He studied it for some time before he was convinced that the name was Isobel de Nevers.

"Mademoiselle."

"Yes, monsieur." Mademoiselle Houlette stood as attentively as a long-legged terrier waiting for its master to throw the ball.

"I am sure your cousin, madame the concierge, must know something about Isobel de Nevers. You mind asking her?"

"What is it, please, monsieur would like to know?"

"Does she poison her lovers at tea, pick their pockets, and throw them into the Seine to be called suicides? How about this woman?"

Everhard held out the note. The look on his face was much the same as when he watched a man who he knew



had been trying to stack the cards. This Houlette had mysteriously chased off three valets. He felt that she must somehow know something of what it was all about.

Mademoiselle Houlette took the card and stared at it a long time. "Ah, monsieur, alas! I do not read English."

"That's so. But how do you know it is English if you can't read? It's an invitation to tea. What am I to do? I have no mother to advise me. I am asking you."

"I suggest that monsieur do what he would like to do."

"Bad advice, mademoiselle. I thought maybe you had some intuition. I have some. It suggests that I stay in bed for a week."

Mademoiselle Houlette's gray eyes laughed at him, but not her lips.

## 2

Everhard, not having to sleep off booze or food, got on with very few hours in bed; and after a long walk he entered the Horse Shoe shortly after noon. A huge bulk of a man rose with ponderous haste from a massive red chair and charged with both hands out, blubbering welcome through thick lips. It was Kurlingen, Charles Birk Kurlingen.

He wasn't nice people, Kurlingen; and looked it. He had a big belly, blunt thick nose, low square forehead, and cold dull eyes. Everhard didn't like the way Kurlingen was known to treat women, though some brutality when one grows bored is about the only chance a man has to protect himself if he is a bad picker of playmates. Now he looked baggy around the eyes and jowl. Had lost weight. His small eyes were deep in their pouches. Skin was pasty. Clothes seemed too big for him, though Kurlingen was still a massive man.

"Who's been making you sweat?" Everhard sidled off, not wanting Kurlingen's hand on his shoulder.

"I've been having my troubles, Don." Kurlingen shook his big bony head, asking for sympathy, and not finding

it in Everhard's eyes. Then, beaming, and with hearty tone: "It's great to see you! You are one of the few men I can trust . . ." and so forth.

They went to a corner before a little table. Kurlingen had Scotch and soda, and talked about trifles in a way that made Everhard think of a big, hungry, nervous animal trying to sneak up unsuspected on prey. Then Kurlingen pounced, rubbing the blunt nose with the back of his hand as he remarked in a strainedly casual voice: "By the way, I heard the other day that J. K. James's wife is your cousin."

Everhard tipped him a wink over the Vichy glass, leaned forward confidentially. "Do me a favor and deny it every chance you get."

"Huh?"

"May spoil things for me if it gets out—into the papers."

"Oh." Kurlingen listened expectantly.

"Of course I can tell you. You see, I was in a jam. No way out. She is a good-looking girl and knows how to do things. She took him for a ride—to church. Imagine that! Now she's got so much on him he has to stay put. Comes in handy for me, eh?"

Kurlingen grunted. His haggard face was mask-like. "Somebody brought it up over in London, at the club. You've been in the papers there, too. I denied it, of course. Said California was full of Richmonds."

"Thank you." Everhard almost bowed.

"Do anything for you. Anything. Explains a hell of lot, though, doesn't it? You got a break, you did!" His eyes swung to their corners. He shook the ice about in the glass, drained the glass with a guzzling suck. Then as if something were getting away from him in spite of all precautions, he said hoarsely: "I'm in a jam, myself. Hell of a jam." He stared queerly at Everhard.

"Not a chance, Kurlingen. My friends have to kill their



own snakes. I don't pull James's leg for anybody but little Donald Richmond. Nice boy, little Don. I'd do 'most anything for him. Other people can go jump in the lake—Sulphur Lake." Everhard put down the Vichy glass and leaned back, smiling.

Kurlingen grunted. Sounded as if he were trying to say, "God!" but found it too much trouble. He poked a forefinger at the push-button, and kept on grunting. Words, muffled and hoarse, half inarticulate, came rumbling:

"Can't sleep. Can't eat. Whisky and soda. That's all. I'm in a real jam. Not even James could break it. But you know what I think of my friends. I do anything for them. That's me." To the waiter: "Double Scotch, plenty of ice, damn little soda."

Kurlingen reached out a hand strokingly toward Everhard's knee. The knee moved away, but Kurlingen said, "I'll have to take you around some night and show you what Paris is really like."

"I've always wondered," said Everhard, glancing at his watch.

"And I want to see a lot of you, Don." There was insistence in the hoarse voice. "You are one of the few damned men . . ." and so forth.

He guzzled the double Scotch, fiddled with the empty glass, and fixed his eyes broodingly on Everhard, who watched like a hawk that merely pretends to have its head stuck under a wing sleepily. All the fat-sausage gloss was gone from Kurlingen's face. He looked broken. A rotter, Kurlingen; and now somehow desperate.

"Don," he growled, with something very like sincerity in his voice, "sometimes I'm damn sorry you didn't let that bad loser shoot. I'm in a hell of a jam. Aw, to hell with it all!" He nodded, still staring at Everhard. He looked away, sneering at nothing, and poked his thick forefinger at the little button. Everhard smiled behind the

gambler's expressionless face. He had the feeling that Charles Birk Kurlingen would knife his own mother for a chance to make a profit on her coffin.

## 3

Everhard walked around the block, not to be ahead of time for tea, and so had a look at the neighborhood. Nice neighborhood, with the Park Monceau for a front yard. The tang of a drizzle was in the air, and the misty gloaming light helped toward a belief in fairies—and witch maidens, white of face, crimson of mouth, with bruised eyelids.

He rode in an automatic gilt-iron elevator to the top floor and stepped out, pushed the bell, and heard it whir faintly. A pretty, dark-eyed maid in lace cap and lacy apron opened the door. Her hair was drawn back but curled into do-dads, like bakers' snails, over her ears. Her very short skirt had a pleated flare, and the black-silk stockings glistened. She smiled demurely.

Everhard took one hard look at her and did not bat an eye. He thought it bad in poker or elsewhere to show surprise. "Don't like those thingumbobs on your ears, Cluckee. You've got nice ears."

Her slim fingers went up slowly and felt the do-dads all over. Her eyes smiled a little, but with reflected disappointment that he was taking the surprise party so calmly.

"And so you really are a lady's maid, Cluckee?"

"Did I ever give *you* any reason to think I wasn't?" She spoke English, probably knowing that he liked the lilt and faint tinkle of accents.

He offered her hat, stick, and coat. If she wanted to play housemaid with him, all right. She could give some service. She took them a little cautiously, as if afraid of what polite gentlemen are likely to do when they think the maid pretty.



"So you and Mademoiselle Isobel framed this on me?"

"Do you mind?"

"Not so far."

She, lying prettily and with no pretense that she was not lying, said: "Mademoiselle has been called away, and is so sorry that she cannot be back in time to see you. But we may have a little visit, if you are not too disappointed, monsieur."

She was not the childlike girl of the *Trivilia's* deck chair, not the cool young woman of the *Trivilia's* dining-room, not the luring, lying adventuress of the *Trivilia's* cabin, trying to bluff him from venturing to Paris. She was a lady's maid, impudent and wary, with a mirror-practised impish pout that enticed but would not promise.

"A man would be arrested for bigamy if he married you," said Everhard. Commendingly: "You'd fill a harem all by yourself. Are we alone?"

"Isn't Miss Blake coming?" The pout had a taunting mildness.

"Who?"

"Miss Nora Blake." She pretended to be trying not to laugh at him. "You like Miss Blake very much, don't you?"

"No chance to keep secrets from you. Yes, she's a sweet kid." He looked about at the modernistic furnishings. "Are we alone, Cluckee?"

"Why?"

"Say yes and I'll tell you."

"Yes."

"Then pull those buns off your ears and listen. Who is this Mademoiselle Isobel—and why?"

"No one knows, yet."

"She's with that gang." He made the statement, but somehow questioned, demanding her affirmation.

Vilette had a trick for every rôle. As a lady's maid she gave the impression that if you slipped her a few francs she would talk more freely. She admitted nothing, denied

nothing. Her dark eyes were inscrutable, and the hovering smile told nothing.

Everhard nodded. "I get it. You've been planted on her."

Vilette would not answer. Peering reluctance glistened in her eyes, and wary caution. Teasingly but with warning: "Do not try to guess about me, for you will be wrong, whatever you think."

"Not so far wrong. See here, how the hell do you dare tell her you know me? And how the devil did she know me at a glance? And why does she turn over her house to her maid, like this? The whole thing has a phony ring, Cluckee. Except that I know you are genuine."

"Oh, then you think I can't deceive you."

"Me, yes, you little devil. But not James! After the Wattison shindy I told it all—"

"I hope not all!" There was a playful squeak of indignation in the protest.

"All your lies, anyhow. About how you'd kidnapped the real Vilette and that sort of thing. I tied this question on as a tail: 'Can I trust her absolutely? Yes or no?' The answer was 'Yes—and no.'"

"So? Then how can you be sure that I am genuine?"

"That wasn't all the answer, sweetheart. He said, 'She's the cleverest girl in Paris, for her age—or yours.' He said, 'She's a woman, so you can't be sure.' He said, 'I'd trust her, but you use your own judgment.'"

"But after all," she warned him evasively, "you really don't know whether you should or not."

"Pretty child, I do not like those buns." His hand swept the air as if trying to brush them out of sight. "But listen. I've played poker all my life. In all that time I've never held but one royal flush, and I stole that. I knew the cards were stacked against me, but I meant to win the pot. So I took enough. Somebody's stacking the cards in this game. And there's no chance for me to nail a can't-lose hand. But I'm playing you for a royal flush, Cluckee."



I'll stay with you all the way in this game, and there is no limit. That goes. You're a tricky little liar, so practise on me all you like. But you're in the fight against that damned La Tête de Mort. And I'll stay with you till the show-down. That's how I feel about it, Cluckee. So what do we do next?"

She did not move for a long long time. Her big dark eyes widened childlike and grew moist, but there were no tears. Her breast rose and fell with slow, deep breathing, and the look on her face was almost as if she had been hurt—but with kindness.

She put out her hand in a simple slow gesture, took his hand, said quietly, "Let us go into the room." She walked a little ahead, leading him as if he were blind and needed care.

They went into a dimly lighted bizarrely modern room, and sat down together on a low divan before the wood fire that flamed waveringly under a high marble mantel. She held to his hand with gentle firmness. There was no sex about it. Just a weary, sisterly sort of relaxed companionship, as if now for a few minutes she did not have to be on guard, tense, keyed craftily to an evasive rôle.

"I must tell you," she said absently, "before I forget. I am Jeanne Colbert. That is supposed to be my real name. I use it quite openly."

"And may I come often?"

"No, please not. I shall telephone you . . . or write. It is very difficult, this game of La Tête de Mort. There must be no mistakes."

"You know my number?"

"Oh, of course."

"You do know things, don't you, Cluckee?"

She smiled with a slow look that fluttered away toward the fire, and pressed his hand more tightly. The fire grew hotter. She let go of his fingers and rubbed her hands up and down her legs. "Let's move back a little," she said but was scarcely aware of what she said.

He shifted the divan. They sat down side by side. In silence she unpinning the lace cap and put it beside her. Her slim fingers worked in the hair, taking out pins that she dropped in her lap. Then the pins began to go back. The tips of her fingers felt all about delicately.

"There," she said indulgently, turning her head from side to side, "is that better?"

The buns had disappeared. She had drawn the hair about her head in the plain old-fashioned swirl. What pins were left she tossed into the fire.

"Do you really like that little English girl?" She did not look toward him, but her fingers fell into his hand, curling up like fledglings in a nest.

He eyed her. She watched the fire as if reading in flame the words she spoke.

"She's not so darn little," he murmured.

"If you really like her, leave her alone. Don't go near her again."

Her voice was a low monotone. She peered steadily at the fire.

"Why not? Just for instance?"

"I don't know, yet. But they have watched you. Her. She is the first girl you have played with. They will give her money. Always, that first. Then . . . I don't know." She looked at him calmly. "Don't you know what they want to do, almost have to do, with a man like you?"

"Truth is, Cluckee, I didn't know they were really interested in me. Had suspicions. But not a thing that looked . . . well, ominous."

"They are terribly interested. And they want to get you into some horrible affair. It is their stock trick. Then when you feel nothing can save you, they will save you somehow. And you will be grateful. Have to be, or . . ." Her fingers tightened. "They stop at nothing."

"Nothing, eh?"

"Nothing. We fight shadows. We know the shadows are cast by fiends. And they are doubtful about you. Almost



afraid. For one thing, though Don Everhard has had much trouble with the law, you have had more with criminals."

"Wolves fight among themselves."

"That is true. But they wonder because they know now that your pretty cousin is the wife of J. K. James. James broke La Tête de Mort's hold on New York." The full light of her eyes turned on him with hovering gaze.

"What is it, Cluckee?"

"There are many things I mustn't tell you."

"I am asking only one question. Who the devil is Isobel de Nevers?"

She smiled. "The devil, perhaps. Seems like it at times. Really. But I have suggested to Mademoiselle Isobel and she has suggested to La Tête de Mort, that perhaps one reason you have been so lucky in everything is because James of Washington *is* married to your cousin."

"Good. I had the same bright idea to-day with Charles Birk Kurlingen. Is he one of 'em?"

"I don't know." She shook her head as if it was unimportant whether or not she knew. "Perhaps. There are so many, and one seldom knows. Hovenden is, though."

Everhard nodded. "Yes. He smells like one. But see here. How the devil do you, or anybody, get a chance to suggest things to La Tête de Mort?"

Her smile was tolerant. "How much you don't know! One is taken blindfolded to a room—"

"And can't be shadowed?"

"Impossible. Oh, for many reasons. For one, you seldom know, a minute before, when you are to go. The way is craftily hid. And people watch to see if any one is following. You are taken to a room. You see no one. You sit or stand and answer questions asked in a thick, hoarse, brute-like voice. Of course only the more important persons have that rare honor. After all, very simple. And baffling. And doesn't happen often. You see, La Tête de Mort has spies everywhere. And he can give orders out of the dark at any time."

"Hm. But who is this Isobel person, Cluckee? And how did you work it to get to see me alone?"

"Oh, I am far more than Mademoiselle Isobel's maid. This is just a part—for to-day. I thought you would be surprised, and you were merely disappointing. And don't you see, after you wouldn't look at any of the pretty women in silk and jewels, but did take up with that sweet little English girl, why then Mademoiselle Isobel—who isn't wholly a fool!—thought you wouldn't like her make-up. The blood-red mouth. The death color on the eyelids. The wig, the plastered face. She said for me to . . . well, meet you. She has no secrets from me."

"Then she knows you have met me before?"

Vilette hesitated, and reluctantly: "Yes, she does. No one else. And never never let any one know! I was supposed to be in a sanatorium in Switzerland when I went to America. A girl just like me was there, too."

"Lord!" said Everhard, admiringly. "You not only skate on thin ice, you sleep on it, don't you! Terrible to have to be so careful, isn't it? No wonder you put me through the hoops on the *Trivilia*. I forgive you everything but trying to bluff me out of Paris."

She lifted his hand, patting it, and said sweetly: "But now you see why if you could have been what you call 'bluffed' in any way, we wouldn't have wanted you. And you are now my father's royal flush too. So there!"

"Your father?"

Vilette laughed at him, nodding. "Yes. The little gutter-searcher. The *trimadeur*."

"I'll be damned! And he saved my neck. Or at least I'd have been taken in till I heard that bird Hovenden called 'Prince.' I thought that was phony—then found out the next morning in the papers that it wasn't. They not only set a stage right, but get critical reviews."

"But he really is that *phonee*-thing."

"No!"



"My father was long in Egypt and—"

"Does your father by any chance happen to be the gentleman known as Monsieur X.?"

"Yes." She spoke simply, but pride looked up out of her eyes.

Everhard smiled with twist of mouth, pleasantly, grinned broadly. "Will it be all right, Cluckee, if I fall in love with you?"

"No no!" Up went a warning finger. "You are to be in love with Mademoiselle Isobel."

"Whom I haven't met." He shook his head. "If you are serious—"

"I am serious." Her tone left no doubt. "She is very stupid. She thinks every one loves her so—"

"I wouldn't say 'stupid.' Lovers have paid for this furniture and the stuff she wears. She's not my type."

"But you have said that you trusted me," she protested, with a hint of coaxing.

"I do."

"Then do as I say, please!"

"Why the mystery?"

"There is no mystery if you but understood one thing. *La Tête de Mort* has found her useful. Men are fascinated by her because she has no mercy, no conscience, no passion. She is fantastic and dangerous. Notorious, and in France that is fame. Every vain little man with two francs in his pocket thinks perhaps he, *he* can make the conquest of Isobel de Nevers and be admired by the whole world. *Pah!* Men find her contemptuous, so—" Vilette gestured expressively—"that hurts their pride. Many a man thinks he may be the envied one who quickens her passion. Just as so many men buy race-horses, hoping for the Grand Prix."

"Sounds bunky to me," he said, unimpressed. "Some man'll stand her on her ear."

"And you—" she touched his breast with a forefinger—"are to be the one."

"Go on. I like to hear you. You have such a musical voice, especially when lying."

"No no no! I am serious. She will do whatever I say. I can betray her secret to La Tête de Mort! I am the one person she fears. I shall command that she love you. Understand?"

"Nope."

"And I am begging you to pretend to love her."

"Then what?"

"La Tête de Mort will be deceived, and think that through her he has a hold on you. Don't you see?"

"No, I don't see," said Everhard, impatiently. "I think you've left something out of the story, purposely. But what I want to know now is, if Hovenden is phony, who is he and how does he get away with it?"

"Ah, that! Well, it is easier to be sure than to prove he is not the prince. But my father was long in Egypt, and worked to put old Fered on the throne. Yet Hovenden lives in the same ancient house where Fered lived and did terribly cruel things, so it is said. And he is wholly unlike Fered, or any other El Kasyd. He is followed night and day. He has been trapped with friends into even the taxi my father sometimes drives. My father has watched whom he meets and where he goes. We have put spies into his home, and learned nothing—except that he talks much aloud to himself. But the walls are thick. His mail has been read. His telephone has been tapped and some one listens night and day. Even a fire broke out in his house, that my father might enter with men who used axes and cut into the walls for secrets. Nothing was learned."

"Yet you know he is one of them?"

"Yes. My father believes that he is somehow the key to the mystery."

"Why not put him up in a corner and stick pins in 'im? Maybe he'd tell things."

"Maybe he would," she agreed, amused. "But for some



strange reason, La Tête de Mort himself seems to despise Hovenden, yet uses him. And we doubt that even if he tried he could tell anything worth while. And tell me," she asked abruptly, "what do you think of Monsieur Biradou?"

"I don't like him," said Everhard, promptly. "Why?"

She looked at a slipper buckle, said, "Loose again," and crossing her leg on a knee began adjusting the buckle, asking, "Why not?"

"If he is as clever as I think he is, he's dangerous. Why'd you mention him, Cluckee?"

"I shall whisper a secret." She put her foot down, brushed at the skirt, and, leaning closer, said, not earnestly but as if truthful: "Shh-h. Never tell. But Monsieur Biradou is very, very, *very* devoted to the fair Lady Isobel!"

"Glad to hear it. He's not as smart as I thought."

Vilette laughed. "My father says that too. That Monsieur Biradou is not nearly so clever as he makes people believe." Her glance was speculative. Then, "Ah, how you will like my father!"

The telephone rang. She turned, listening as if meaning to let it ring. "I had better answer it." But she did not stir. The phone stopped.

She sighed, reached her feet toward the fire, and crossed her ankles, folded her hands behind her head, leaning far back. "Just to be a little while with somebody you don't have to watch! You have no idea how we, all of us, even Mademoiselle Isobel—she especially—are watched, spied on. And one little slip . . . I know. How well I know!"

Everhard had much to ask, but said nothing. To speak now—or move—seemed about as if to awaken one who very wearily had at last fallen into a restful doze. He watched her admiringly. Her motionless eyes gazed at the fire.

The telephone began ringing again. Vilette sighed and

moved, getting up at once, but reluctantly. She crossed the room, pressed a button, and the telephone came from a little compartment in the wall.

"Allo." Her voice was indifferent.

The next instant her lithe body turned on motionless feet and her glance, with startled intensity, struck on Everhard's face. She listened, watching him anxiously, then, interrupting with rippling French and a tone of authority: "One moment, please. I cannot hear well. I must close the door."

She ran at Everhard. "Quick, you must go! It is the voice of one who must be obeyed. And he demands Mademoiselle Isobel, who is in her room and must come." She was pulling Everhard toward the door. "She will not come unless you are gone. Please." He yielded, not protesting but somehow not believing her.

She slapped his hat crosswise on his head, bundled his coat into his arms, poked his gloves at a coat pocket, hooked his stick over an elbow, gave him a push, opened the door, and caught his arm. "And stay away from Nick Dodalus!"

He paused, resisting, and asked, "Why on earth?"

Vilette shook her head decidedly, saying, "Not now!" and closed the door against him. He trickily tried to flip a loose end of his top-coat into the door and so keep it from locking, but the trick didn't work.

He was mystified and suspicious, but grinned a little because it was so much as if a husband had unexpectedly come in the back way.

"Tell me," he said to himself, "in a layout like this there is no extension where Mademoiselle Isobel could talk? Tell me we are alone, then tell me Mademoiselle Isobel is here? Cluckee, you've pulled a fast one."

He stood broodingly for a moment or two with eyes closed, bringing back the picture of Isobel de Nevers in the Tohu-Bohu . . . taking off the gold wig . . . wip-



ing away the wax-like plaster . . . rubbing the lip-stick from the crimson mouth.

"I'll be damned!" he said solemnly. "You amazing little devil. No wonder you can make Mademoiselle Isobel do whatever you damn well please." He nodded and poked the elevator button. "She had to come to the phone. And the cat would have been out of the bag if you let me stay."

## Chapter Eleven

### 1

EVERHARD went back to his apartment for the evening. Madmeoiselle Houlette eyed him questioningly. He shook his head.

"The fair lady decided that her mother was dying or something, and didn't show up. I just met Monsieur Guyot down on the street. Perhaps he's just back from England."

"England, monsieur?"

"Didn't you know? He goes often."

"Not since they have been in this house, monsieur."

"No?"

"Oh, la la la!" said Mademoiselle Houlette. "Every morning I open all the windows to air our rooms. There is no morning that I have not heard him swearing at madame. I should have noticed if there had been no bad words shouted."

"Poor madame," Everhard murmured sympathetically.

"She gives monsieur soup from the same pot," said Mademoiselle Houlette, and shrugged her angular shoulders.

### 2

Everhard strolled into the Horse Shoe, but at once caught sight of two men neither of whom he cared to talk with. One was Kurlingen, bulking in a chair that faced the entrance to the lounge, as if watching for somebody. But he was giving an order to a waiter—holding up two fingers, which meant double Scotch—and did not see Everhard.



Everhard probably would not have run from Kurlingen, since he suspected Kurlingen of knowing things he wanted to learn, but there was also Monsieur Biradou, black of beard, straight as a general having his picture taken, and clicking his graphlex eyes, while the fox-faced secretary humbly talked over Biradou's shoulder as if wanting him to find out who had hocused one of the house wheels or got to the card decks in the safe and marked them. Everhard preferred not to be brought to Biradou's attention. As one of the chiefs of the Sûreté, a man of tremendous importance, he could make anybody he took a dislike to very unhappy.

On the street Everhard found it was raining hard. He mentally tossed a coin to see whether he should go home and enjoy the fire or to the Rue Pigalle and tell some lies to Nora. "Tell her my wife's come home and won't let me play out nights any more."

## 3

He wedged into a place behind a table and ordered tea for a change. He pretended to read a newspaper, but wondered which of this crowd was, and had been, keeping an eye on him. Useless speculation. As yet he felt that he had no reason to dodge anybody that wanted to shadow him; but he was curious.

Nora came along a little after eleven. Her tam was wet, her stockings and feet were wet. She shivered, hugging her damp coat with the rabbit fur pulled tight about her neck. She looked hollow-eyed and a bit faded from the night before, and needed sleep.

"You are drinking hot whisky," he told her as she squeezed in beside him. "Where's Betty? And why the wet clothes?"

"We had a taxi home, but I decided not to go to bed, and came along over here."

"Just paused, as it were, on the way to the hospital—with pneumonia."

"I'll be all right. We only live once. It's enough, don't you think? How is Mr. Nick?"

"Oh, he'll be out again to-night. He makes the rounds for exercise. His daily dozen. Or playing poker. You haven't eaten all day? Be truthful."

"Tea and toast. And some candied cherries that one of the girls had sent her. It *is* cold." She sipped hot whisky, smoked Cravens, and looked thoughtful.

Everhard studied her face, now a little pale and drawn, with a faint dark tint under her eyes; but still a sweet face, and lovably honest.

"If I were an honorable gentleman, Nora, I'd spank you and put you to bed with a hot-water bottle. As it is, the best I can do is say, 'Let's eat!' Then you get into bed and stay there sixteen hours."

She turned with a bouncing jerk, eagerly: "Let's go to Belito's!"

"Don't know it."

"I've never been there, either. But they say it's wonderful."

"All you do is eat. No dancing. Where is the joint?"

Nora dabbed out her cigarette, opened her bag, fished about and got an envelop on which an address had been written.

"Where's Rue Vesle?" he asked.

"Don't know, I'm sure. But they say it is a queer, jolly, nice place."

## 4

The taxi, after wandering about through the rain in Montmartre, turned into a black little street and stopped where light glowed through a door of painted green glass. Everhard shook Nora and she stirred drowsily on his shoulder, then woke up. The green glass door at once opened. A skinny half-bald waiter, on the watch for guests, looked out, and, opening an umbrella in the en-



trance, stepped across the two-foot sidewalk and made a marquee of sorts.

Inside, Everhard took a look about. The ceiling was low, the room narrow and not well lighted. The walls were askew, as if the house, growing old, had started to fall down but on second thought decided to wait a while. There was a long old sleeve-polished table on one side, and two or three small tables on the other. The long table had no covering at all; the little tables were laid with oilcloth, and if you sat at one of them the bill would probably be a franc more.

Men at the long table were playing dominoes, and slouchingly looked at Everhard and Nora. A man and a woman were at a small table. The woman eyed Nora sneeringly. Professionals in every line hate the novice.

"Not in this dump," said Everhard. "We're not sight-seeing. I want you to eat."

But as he pulled at her arm, a man with a big mustache, dark eyes, pale face, and short stout body, came on the trot to make them welcome. If his face had been red instead of pale he would have looked like a butcher in Sunday clothes. Ah, he exclaimed, how he would reward madame and monsieur for coming to his humble café on such a wet, cold night! So many Americans came often, and were his friends. A wonderful country, America. The private room, of course.

"This way, monsieur-dame, if you please." With beacon-like forefinger sticking up over his shoulder as if it were sore and had to be held carefully, he led the way back to a curtained cubby-hole and turned on the light.

The table was laid with fresh linen, and the dishes looked as if they had been washed instead of merely wiped. Some of the queer little obscure places do have very fine food, and this looked as if fairly discriminating guests did come now and then. There were even flowers, geraniums. You could see where the wilted blooms had been picked off. The host himself bustled welcomingly;

and the waiter, who looked like a saddened wet rat, got helpfully in the way.

"You see," said Nora, rubbing her fingers over the clean linen, then bending to sniff the stale geraniums, "they do have people in."

"Who touted this joint?"

"One of the girls in the show. Said she came often."

"Been with the show long?"

"Long as I have. Why?"

"Why?" Everhard repeated evasively. "I have to make conversation somehow."

The host rattled off wine jargon; but Everhard interrupted with:

"No wine."

"No wine, monsieur?"

"No wine."

"No wine!" He groaned as if Everhard had pulled a tooth, and backed out under the doorway curtain. The kitchen was close by. They could hear his sad voice repeat, "No wine!" to the rat-like waiter; and the rat-like squeak echoed, "No wine!"

Yet the service came through without noticeable discourtesy. The food was simple, and Nora said it was good. Everhard did nothing more than mess up his plate so the host wouldn't feel insulted, and gave her his portions.

The dessert came. Everhard sniffed wine sauce and pushed it toward Nora.

"Um, good!" she said.

"Pretty girls like sweets. Grown men like pretty girls. In that way everybody gets his sugar. . . . You don't know yet who sent you that money?"

"You didn't—honest?"

"Yes, of course. And don't ever let any other bozo make you think he did it."

She looked fixedly at the dessert and kept on eating. She put the empty dish aside. "I feel better for knowing



you did it, and not some one else." She tapped the empty dish with the spoon, nervously. "But please don't do it any more."

"I'm inclined to think I'm going to do it again. And soon." He pushed the second dessert before her. "Here, eat this. In fact, I think perhaps I'll inclose a ticket to England in the next letter. Would you use it?"

"Whatever for?" She replaced the full spoon in the dish to look at him.

"A rich friend of mine gives me an allowance to spend on nice girls every year. You see, if I gave it all to you in a lump sum, then I needn't go searching around for another year. Hurry up so you can get to bed."

She rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand. "I am sleepy all right."

Everhard watched her, wondering what lie to tell next. And even as he looked she dropped forward and did not move. He shook her, not speaking; then listened. There was no longer the click of dominoes, no bubble of words over the game. Not a sound. Not even rattle or click of dish in the near-by kitchen. He recalled not having heard any one go out. He stood up with a foot on the seat of the chair and looked over the partition. The café was empty. Glasses and saucers remained on the little table. The dominoes lay in zigzag lines, as when players get up and go away before the game is finished.

He stepped down, eying the motionless drawn curtains. He sat down and turned toward Nora. She lay with her face on the crook of an elbow; the other arm dangled loosely at her side. He shook her, not speaking. She did not stir. He reflected: "So somebody at the American bar overheard her say Belito's. Telephoned or sent a messenger, and we were expected." Vilette's "If you really like her, leave her alone. Stay clear away from her," now seemed an inside tip.

He wondered if they had poisoned Nora. Poisoned people usually made a howl before they passed out. And

he could not see how poisoning her would get him into much of a jam. Knock-out juice? More like it. But why? He was curious. He ran his hand inside the dress, against Nora's breast, listening with sensitive finger-tips and keeping his eyes on the curtain. A poker-player's finger-tips are as good as a stethoscope.

Everhard sat back and waited. He did not feel uncomfortable. He was awake, with his back to the wall, and a .45 under his coat. The pale-faced Belito could do the worrying.

There was the tiptoe tread of a stealthy foot. The curtain stirred, was gently drawn aside, and the half-hairless rat-like waiter peered in with eyes set in the tense furtiveness that is like a confession.

"All right, start the show," said Everhard.

An explosive expression popped on the rat-like face, and the fellow squeaked, letting the curtain fall with a fling, and shouted, "The man is awake!"

Everhard was up, bumpingly shifted the table, and had the curtains half off their rings all in time to see the waiter scoot with frantic jostle past the pale Belito at the kitchen doorway. Belito looked more like a butcher than ever now that he had a long knife in his hand. He gave Everhard a pop-eyed stare that focused on a leveled automatic, flung the knife far behind him, turned with a blubber-sound of fright, and bolted. Pans clattered as if thrown when he bumped a table that was in his way. A moment later there was the jar of a heavy back door as it swung shut.

Everhard, without any haste at all, but carefully destructive, pitched the chairs out of the cubby-hole, making room. The snap of their frail broken legs had a pleasant sound. He jerked off the curtains and kicked them out of the way, then put on his top-coat and pulled his hat down tightly. He wadded Nora's purse into his pocket, snapped his walking-stick across his knee so Monsieur Belito could not get any profit from the fact that



it was being left behind, and gathered Nora into his arms.

The front door was fastened only with a bolt on the inside. He went out into the rain, carrying Nora as if she were a very heavy and completely limp baby. It was a dark little side street with uneven narrow sidewalk and cobbled pavement. The rain fell blindingly. Everhard did not know where he was; did not greatly care, being pleased that whatever story Monsieur Belito cared to tell, there was one that he couldn't make stick: that Everhard had quarreled with the girl and stabbed her.

## 5

He wandered stumbingly about, always taking any street that led downhill. He did not see a taxi until he came upon one with the driver asleep in the front seat and the flag down. He opened the door and struggled squirmingly. The jar of his rather awkward effort to carry a girl through the narrow door and place her on the seat stirred the driver into wakefulness. As it was dark in the cab, the man took it for granted the fare who had told him to wait had returned.

Everhard gave the address. The driver hesitated as if sensing that something wasn't right; but he was an old driver, therefore discreet. Off he went. Everhard held Nora against him on the seat. If he had just fished her out of the Seine neither of them could have been wetter.

When Everhard got out and asked for help, the driver saw that something had been slipped over on him. He wanted to talk about it. Everhard coaxed him with a handful of francs, and the suggestion that he could hurry back and probably pick up the other fare anyhow. The man may have wondered why Everhard tipped him so much more heavily than seemed necessary even under the circumstances. Perhaps he would understand if his next fare yelled that there was water ankle-deep in the cab and the leather seat like a sponge. But perhaps he would get a drunk who didn't notice.

Very poor concierge Nora had. The old witch was so used to letting people in and out at all hours of the night that she pressed her latch-lock button without waking up. Everhard made a rumpus and she turned on the light and stared at him from the shadows with head out-thrust. Gray lank hair fell about her face. Her nightgown was not clean. When she saw a stranger in dress clothes—dirty, wet dress clothes, but dress clothes—with an unconscious girl in his arms, the hag began to make a clamor and frantically talk of the police, figuring to get a bigger tip than by being agreeable. Everhard told her some things in the sort of French that made her think perhaps he wasn't, after all, an American. So she let him put Nora on a couch and use the telephone.

He rang the Horse Shoe Club and asked for Nick Dodalus. It was a chance, but Everhard felt lucky. "Tell him a man, not a woman, is calling."

Dodalus came to the phone, gutturally gruff.

"This is Richmond, Nick. What are you doing?"

"Ho, hello you! Me, I'm taking Kurlingen's pants away from him."

"Good. Take his shirt too. And the belly-button. Listen. This is private. Send a doctor up here. One that's got lockjaw. Nora passed out on me. And I'm in a hurry."

The old witch had modestly got into a dirty red dressing-gown and, having sized things up, now wanted to be agreeable. She whined affably, "Ah, Mademoiselle Blake was such a nice girl!"

"She's still a nice girl. Just sprained her ankle and the pain made her faint."

Everhard started up the narrow, dim, twisted stairs. Nora rapidly seemed to gain weight. A trail of water marked the way and some of it was sweat. He afterward said of the incident, "If you've read 'Sappho,' which was a naughty book when I was a kid, you know something of how I felt."

A very dim light burned in the fourth-floor hallway.



He kicked on the door. There was no answer. He kicked again, and a neighboring door opened. A frowzy man looked out, grumbling: "What is all this noise about? Those English girls, they are no good!"

"You," said Everhard, conversationally, "are a damn liar." Imperatively: "Come here. Her purse is in my pocket. Take it out. Find the key. Unlock this door . . . and keep what change you find."

The man, a young one who slept in his underwear—the kind that went from unwashed neck to dirty ankles—came with greedy readiness, muttering, "The police may ask about this."

"And if they do, don't lie; tell them the truth. The truth may be that I kicked you down the stairs. It will be, if you make another crack like that. And I should like the police to think well of me."

The fellow gave him a startled look. He was not used to finding people unafraid of the police when blackmail was hinted. However, glad of the chance at any little windfall, he took out the purse and got the few franc notes in his fingers before he took out the key. He opened the door.

"Put the purse back in my pocket. And you are not coming in." Everhard stepped blindly into the unlighted room and kicked the door to.

"Betty! Betty!" No answer. Everhard said things, awakeningly. They did no good. He cracked his shin on a rocker, into which he fumblingly eased Nora.

He felt about for the light. There was no wall switch. The light came on. It was a weak bulb. The room was about twelve by sixteen and had a gas-plate, a bureau, a lacquered pine table covered with unwashed tea things, a small kitchen sink, some framed chromos, and a couch that served as a double bed. The carpet was a lobster red, badly faded and stained, especially toward the sink and gas-plate, where it crawled, as if ashamed of itself, under a strip of worn linoleum.

Betty slept face up, with both arms curved about her curly head. She looked like a naughty angel that had gone to bed without washing her face. He shook her. No good. He held thumb and forefinger to her nose and his palm over her mouth. That brought her around with nightmarish struggling. She sat up, frightened, blinking. Un-easily: "What are you doing here?"

"Nora's had bad luck. Ptomaine or something. Doctor's on the way. Help get her out of those wet clothes." He lifted Nora to the foot of the bed, where she would not dampen any other part of the covering.

Betty, with scrambling kick at the bedclothes and flurry of nightgown—she might skimp on food, but she slept in silk—had sprung out of bed. She threw herself passionately at her friend, hugged the wet body, kissed the cold mouth, got her own flimsy silk all wet and didn't mind, but tugged at the soaked coat. She flung the coat on the floor, swished the tam at the wall, tossed the slippers unseeingly toward the sink, but stripped off the wet stockings with gentle care so as not to start runs.

Everhard, with a shoulder against the doorway, regarded her steadily. "If the Recording Angel don't blot all your black marks for this, I'll have him fired, Betty."

She flung up her curly head in hasty questioning; asked, "Whatever do you mean?" and did not pause for the answer, but, tender and frantic, went on with the undressing. "Turn your head," said she, without looking to see if he did. A moment later, "Oh damn!" under her breath.

"Tear 'em off," said Everhard, his face to the wall. "There'll be others." And Betty tore.

## 6

The doctor came, with Nick Dodalus puffing at his side from the long climb on the stairs. Nick held a freshly lighted cigar. Betty absently gave one hand to Dodalus,



who kept it. She gathered her faded dressing-gown tightly with the other and crouched by the bed, peering now at the doctor, now at Nora.

Everhard in rapid French told the doctor that they had ventured into the wrong sort of place, and he, not being hungry, had accidentally passed up whatever dishes contained the knock-out drops. Betty, understanding little more French than café and shopping phrases, did not catch it. Dodalus growled. His soft eyes grew hard. What he said wasn't a nice thing to say, but Everhard thought the better of him. A coarse Greek, born God knew where, raised, educated, in the market-places of Constantinople, Cairo, Port Saïd, Marseilles; an ugly fellow with no morals—just a heart, and eyes like an English setter's.

"How'd you come out with Kurlingen?" Everhard asked.

"Got an I.O.U. instead of a check. He's pinched. Maybe he needs some money. I'll ask to-morrow."

"Don't do it, Nick."

"Why not?"

"Has anybody ever tried to put the screws on you? Get you into a hole? Kick you into something you didn't want to do?"

"Just all my life!" said Dodalus, grinning. "I tell 'em to go to hell and forget it. I mean I forget it. I don't trust Kurlingen, but I'm way into him, so just as a friend—"

"He has no friends, Nick. Just victims. He was born twins. In the cradle he choked his brother so he could have both teats. He's still doing it."

"Why, he said you and him were the best of friends."

"He'd say anything."

The doctor gave Nora a hypodermic of some kind. A sixteen-thousand-dollar limousine with liveried chauffeur waited in the rain long after a cloudy dawn became hazy daylight; and a famous Champs-Élysées doctor, a millionaire tobacco merchant, and a hard-boiled poker-player, sat or stood in the shabby room of an unclean tenement, waiting for a back-row chorus-girl to wake up and smile.

Betty wanted to fry eggs for them, or something. She shook the spoonful of cheap cognac in the bottle and apologized. She dug out a half-package of wilted Cravens; and wouldn't they like coffee? At last she curled up on Dodalus's lap and tried to stay awake, but couldn't.

## 7

Dodalus and the doctor had gone. Everhard had promised to stay for breakfast, so Betty went out to buy something to eat. Nora sat up against bunched pillows, with fingers pressing her head and aspirin in her hand. Everhard held out the glass of water.

"Come clean. Who sent you to Belito's?"

"Madge Kenyon. And, oh, wait till I see her!"

"Somebody got to her, somehow. She didn't know what it was all about. An old trick, that sort of thing from the people I play with. Listen, I'll tell you some secrets. But don't repeat 'em. Not even to Betty. You won't, I know. I'm a Communist agent. Some people who don't like me framed that play. We beat 'em to the door. They may bother you. Want you to answer questions. So you are going to England, you and Betty. You girls go to some quiet place and rest."

"You don't need to give me money. Just enough for passage, maybe. I want to go home anyhow. Honest, I do. I'll give notice at the theater and in a week—"

"Week, hell! You're going by air to-day—noon!"

They went, flushed, tense, excited, uneasy, but wholly joyful in feeling that this was real adventure. Everhard complacently decided that a little vacation wouldn't do much harm, except that they might fatten up and grow blowzy from idling and eating regularly.



## *Chapter Twelve*

### 1

ONE morning Everhard saw an item in the paper that did not make him weep. The police had identified a mutilated body a tug churned up in the Seine as that of one Belito, proprietor of a café on the Rue Vesle, who had been missing for a week. Perhaps he had talked as well as bungled.

There also came, by mail, a little slick-paper illustrated magazine, with a marked item under a picture of Mademoiselle Isobel de Nevers. It said that a new admirer had been admitted to Mademoiselle Isobel's intimate circle, one Monsieur Don Richmond, an industrious American gentleman who strongly approved of Prohibition—for the same reason that ammunition-makers find war ennobling.

"Cluckee's press-agents are on the job," Everhard reflected.

### 2

There had been a telephone in the apartment when Everhard got it. He had let it remain—in the name of the party from whom he had taken a sublease. And he had given the number to no one. Vilette had said she knew it; but she was likely to know anything the police could find out.

But Kurlingen telephoned. "We must have a little visit, Don. Where've you been keeping yourself? How about lunch?"

"If you'll tell me how you got my phone number."

"I asked Nick if he knew, and he gave it to me."

"Oh, of course."

In the Horse Shoe Club, Dodalus threw away his cigar and sauntered over to the magazines where Everhard seemed to be glancing about for something to read. He said, "Hello," in the tone and with the grin of a lonely fellow toward a man who likes him.

"Oh, hello, Nick. Still lucky?"

Dodalus clipped the end of a fresh cigar, struck twice at the match-box, and raised the flame to a small torpedo-like cigar between his lips. "I took your tip." He was trying to talk with the cigar in his mouth, but removed it. "I'm not accepting I.O.U.s. He don't like it."

"Ugly."

"Hurt-like." Dodalus eyed the cigar's tip critically, put the cigar into his mouth, and resolutely jerked it out: "Wonder can I give *you* a tip about something?"

"Nothing I'd like better."

"You won't get mad?"

"Never lost my temper in my life. Brings wrinkles. And knocks the spots off your poker."

"Listen." He moved closer, half whispering. "Lay off that Isobel de Nevers. She's bad."

"No?"

"I know."

"Know her?"

"Hell no! I ain't that kind of a fool. But she dopes men. That's how she nails 'em to the cross. It ain't her charms; she ain't got any. It's dope."

"Really, Nick? How'd you learn that?"

"Prince Hovenden, he told me. On the quiet."

"Ah. Did he suggest that you mention it to me?"

"No. But he said she's hooked you. You're her latest."

"But no doubt he meant for you to speak to me. Thoughtful of him. Very thoughtful fellow, the prince. By the way, Nick, do you know my phone, just in case you might want to call me?"

"No, but I'd like to." He groped for a note-book and gold pen. Everhard gave him an incorrect number.



"Thanks. Sometimes I don't know what to do with myself. What are you doing to-night?"

"Sleep."

"Hell of a way at your age, and in Paris, to waste time!" said Dodalus, rebukingly. "You like Prince Hoven-den, don't you?"

"Oh, sure."

Dodalus nuzzled closer, confidentially. "If something happened in Egypt—and anything's likely to happen in that damn country! I know!—he might be a real king." Dodalus glowed with enthusiasm. "I've got some pull in that country, too."

"See here, Nick. Don't go day-dreaming. Old Fered himself couldn't make the grade. The French wanted him. The English didn't. The English muddle things in war and international politics—oh, terribly! But for the other fellow, always."

Dodalus stared at him so long and blankly that his freshly lighted cigar went out. "How do you know?"

"Know what, Nick?"

"About . . . oh, nothing." He eyed the cold cigar-tip, and, still eying it: "About what can or can't be done in Egypt." He wiped his forehead with the heel of his palm without looking up.

"Egypt? Hell! I'm not talking about Egypt. I'm talking about English history. So long, Nick."

From the door Everhard saw him standing there, still gazing at the cold cigar-tip.

3

Kurlingen tried to be hearty, but was only noisy. Everhard, meeting him for the first time in daylight, thought he looked worse than ever; and pretending to pick a hair off his lapel got a near view of the big diamond in his tie and learned a lot. Kurlingen must have been hit harder than any one suspected.

They went to a restaurant where Kurlingen ate stewed eel, creamed chicken, with a side dish of goose and beans, drank Burgundy, and for dessert *pêches flammées*, all the while complaining that his appetite wasn't what it used to be. Which was true.

"What you been doing with yourself, Don? Nobody sees you much. No way to treat friends."

"I go to the museums a lot. Am making a study of lace. Intricate and dainty subject, lace. May take up crocheting."

Kurlingen, once a bulldozer, had certainly slipped. Something had got his nerve, his old self-assurance. Since there was a bit of sun, they went for a drive in the Bois. Kurlingen told Everhard there was no man he so liked, trusted, admired . . . and so forth. He asked if Everhard wanted any help in getting some ships filled with the best stuff and off to the Pacific. Said he had influence; said he would be glad to use it for Everhard.

For two hours Kurlingen, growing more and more fretful, hinted, pried, pulled, cajoled, and tried to get Everhard to confide the least little thing of his affairs. It was a chill day, but moisture trickled on Kurlingen's sweat-band and he frequently took off his hat to wipe his forehead.

When Everhard stepped from his car near the Opéra, Kurlingen said: "That lunch don't set well. I'm going to a drug-store. See you to-morrow." With what was meant to be affectionate earnestness: "If you ever want advice or influence, call on me, my boy. I'll never forget how you saved my life that time."

4

Everhard walked toward the île Saint Louis by going down the Rue de la Paix. Even though he did not wear diamonds, any more than he painted pictures, he liked them—both diamonds and pictures.



There, slap-dab in front of de Rossi's, he came face to face with Hovenden and Vilette.

She was now a Parisienne from feather's tip to fastidiously dainty toe. Her hat was a half-helmet sort of thing that appeared to be made of bronze beaten into polished scales; and a cluster of red stones held up a bronze-like metal feather. Her dark hair was barely visible in little wispy curls that looked as though they had crowded out all by themselves instead of having been pulled and twisted into place ornamentally. The chinchilla hugged her slim body as if it were a living thing and loved. The Parisienne has a born flair for making you want to flirt with her. It's in her blood, but shows in her dress, in the alert swing of supple body, dancing ripple of lips, tilt of head, flashing quick gay wit that is like a promise—one that is usually kept if you don't marry her; and sometimes even then.

Quickly Vilette put out her hand, and, turning to Hovenden: "I have asked Mr. Richmond to call me Mademoiselle Colbert." She was pointedly reminding Everhard of a name he might have forgotten.

Hovenden bowed as if his shoulder braces were a too tight fit.

"You must come with us to the Ritz for tea!" Her tone was insistent, and her hand, with obvious affection, pressed his arm. In fact, she made Everhard a little uncomfortable by so pointedly ignoring Hovenden, and being so pleased at having chanced on him.

They had not been at the table ten minutes before Hovenden was called to the telephone; and he was still in sight when Vilette said rapidly:

"You were very lucky, my friend, at Belito's! No one seems to know just what happened, except that you got away all right, and La Tête de Mort is furious—"

"So I saw by the paper."

"Please listen. I must talk quickly. We haven't but two minutes. I want you to know that they will keep after you

until in some way they do get you into a horrible mess, unless you do something yourself."

"What do you suggest, Cluckee?"

"They would have killed that poor English girl. They want you charged with some terrible crime. Can't you do something like—oh, I don't know what! Something that will make them believe you are a clever criminal. They are afraid merely to ask you to join La Tête de Mort. That isn't their way. They offer a membership, or whatever you call it, to people who are in trouble. So they have to get you into trouble. And they will. Don't you realize—"

"All that's unimportant," said Everhard, impatiently. "When do I get to see the lovely Isobel with whom I am in love?"

"We have been awfully busy and—"

"You and Isobel, hm?"

Vilette looked at him keenly, then stirred her tea. She looked up again. "Did you guess? Or were you told?"

"Guessed it, sweet child. Your telephone must have an extension. She could have talked over that."

She turned the setting of a ring inside and studied it, then turned the setting around. "It is all right, I suppose. Lots of people do know that Jeanne Colbert is Isobel de Nevers. I just thought it better if you didn't, yet."

"How can they think I am in love with anybody I don't see?"

"Well, then, do something daring and criminal to prove it." She spoke lightly but evidently was in earnest. "I am very greedy and avaricious. You must make me presents—"

"Hovenden is jealous of me?"

"Oh, very!"

"You make me happy. I don't like him."

"Neither do I," said Vilette, emphatically.

"But ah, I see something now! That fellow Biradou is devoted not to Isobel, but to little Cluckee herself."



She laughed a little, but shook her head. "Mostly to Mademoiselle Isobel."

"And doesn't he suspect that she is hooked up with the Death's-Headers?"

"As to that," she said saucily, "you had best inquire of Monsieur Biradou himself."

"You've told me. He's one of 'em. And on the inside, isn't he?"

"He would like to be," she said slowly, glancing aside to see if Hovenden was coming. "I knew Hovenden expected a call here. That's one reason I brought you along—so we could have a minute alone. And, too, I wanted him to see that I . . . I mean that *Mademoiselle Isobel* likes you very much."

"Well, if she never stops deceiving me, I shall be quite content. But please, Cluckee, what's wrong with Dodalus?"

"Nothing much." She was looking across the room, watchfully. "Only keep away from him. He's not the type they want or can use. He has no reputation, so they can't blackmail him. Has all the money he wants, and more, so they can't buy him. His business is in the Near East and he deals with men who trust him and wouldn't trust anybody else, so they couldn't get control of it if he died. But he has the silly notion of wanting to get Hovenden on the throne of Egypt. And if you go around with him, they can do something—Here comes Monsieur Hovenden." Her hands moved in restrained fluttering, and she talked gay chitter-chatter, seeming not to notice Hovenden's return until Everhard arose.

## Chapter Thirteen

### 1

IT BEGAN to rain shortly after dark. Everhard decided to remain at home. At midnight he was in dressing-gown and slippers, with open book on his lap, and dreamily eyed the wet night through the tall open French windows. The chill moist air was pleasant because a great bed of coals heated the room. There were radiators, but about all they did was to thump and leak, and they were never even lukewarm at midnight.

The door-bell rang. He started to rise, but at once heard the long stride of Mademoiselle Houlette. There was a moment's low chatter of women's voices. Mademoiselle Houlette, with a card on a tray, marched in, followed breathlessly by her fat cousin, Madame Thurot the concierge, who began to talk at once.

Everhard picked up the card: *Mr. Charles Birk Kurlingen*.

He eyed it about as he would if it had been inscribed Mr. Mephistopheles.

Madame Thurot was still talking—and acting now, too. He flipped the card back at the tray.

"Monsieur does not read the message," said Mademoiselle Houlette, and held out the tray again. Madame Thurot did not pause.

Everhard turned the card over, and read: "I have told these damn fools you sent for me, but they won't believe it. K."

Everhard stood up, laying the book aside, and spun the card into the fire. He watched it as if to get his decision from how the card burned. It struck squarely on the coals,



smoked a moment, then little yellow flames blazingly ate it.

Madame Thurot's fat body bulged into curious flutters as she told how when the bell rang she had awakened her husband with prod of elbow; how he, peering through the curtains, had seen a stranger and hastily put on trousers and sabots and stepped out. The stranger demanded Monsieur Richmond. Madame Thurot struck an attitude to show how her husband confronted the stranger with "*Mais non!*" Monsieur Thurot had been at Verdun. He knew how to keep people from passing. She then showed how the bulky stranger had tried to march by and mount the stairs; how Monsieur Thurot repeated, "*Mais non!*" and barred the way.

So while fat Madame Thurot puffed up the stairs with card and message, Kurlingen had to cool his heels on the cobblestones where once the iron-shod horses of cavaliers pawed restlessly, and milady's coach rattled and creaked on its great leather springs.

Everhard thanked her with his best air of gratitude.

## 2

Kurlingen came, gasping. A big flabby man sweating in a dress-suit. A huge diamond-like stud glistened on the front of his shirt, and by artificial light looked genuine.

He advanced toward Everhard with both hands out, joyously. "I told you, my dear boy, that you could count on me, day or night. And here I am!"

Without any particular inflection Everhard said, "Yes, here you are."

"How devilish hot it is!" Kurlingen wiped his face and the fleshy folds of his overflowing neck.

Everhard heaved his biggest chair sidewise to the open windows, and gestured invitingly. The cool air stirred the heavy curtains. Kurlingen pulled the chair even a little nearer the window and sat down. He looked eager, pleased, almost satisfied. "Can I have a drink, my boy?"

"Water?"

Mademoiselle Houlette came with a glass of water. Kurlingen gave her a long unfavorable look. He drank half the glass, and asked, "She speaks English?"

"No."

"Why don't you get yourself a good-looking house-keeper?"

Everhard said quite without emphasis, "If you didn't have money, Kurlingen, even bums would kick you out."

Kurlingen gulped the rest of the water, laughed, thinking it was a joke. He gave back the glass to Mademoiselle Houlette without a "Thank you." She left the room.

He rubbed his hands on the moist handkerchief, scrubbed the inside of his stiff collar, gulped a few deep breaths of cool air, and gazed expectantly at Everhard. "Well now, my dear boy, what can I do for you?"

"For me?"

"Yes. I got your message. You said twelve. I'm right on the dot."

Kurlingen rubbed his palms together rapidly and beamed.

Everhard turned to the fire and put on another log. There was a silver platter on the mantel. Mademoiselle Houlette kept it polished to a mirror's sheen. He could see Kurlingen's reflection in that. Everhard reluctantly decided that Kurlingen was not wholly lying.

Everhard went to a table, pushed the open book aside, sat on a corner, and with both hands deep in his dressing-gown's pockets asked: "Now, who do you suppose could have played a trick like that—on you? Or is it on me?"

"You mean . . ." With big, soft hands on the chair's arms Kurlingen half arose, staring.

"I do," said Everhard.

Kurlingen dropped back as if from a hard blow. He gasped questioningly, "Before God?"

Everhard looked at him, not moving. Kurlingen groaned



softly. He swore, and collapsed into a shapeless bulk, quite as if half the life had been beaten out of him.

Pretty much of an actor, Kurlingen; or was once, and could bluster, frown, glare, be brutally domineering, and get away with it. Being emotional was a new stunt. Everhard, thoroughly distrusting and disliking him, was scarcely even interested.

"Don, I'm smashed, broke, and . . . and . . . if you don't help me . . ."

Having said it, he plainly wished he hadn't. Something very like a look of hate flashed, and he wiped his face as if hiding something. When he dropped the hand the look had passed.

"How so?" Everhard picked up the open book as if about to read.

Kurlingen seemed trying to get hold of himself, fumbled for a cigarette-case, and drew out something trinket-like that he hastily thrust back with startled jerk of eye to see if Everhard had noticed.

His fingers trembled as he selected a cigarette. "Give me a match, will you?" Then prodded by a slow afterthought, "Please."

Everhard tore a strip of newspaper, twisted it, crossed to the fire, lighted it, and held the flame to Kurlingen's cigarette. He sat down again on the edge of the table.

Kurlingen blew smoke through his nose and mouth as he spoke. His voice had an echo of the old bullying quality. "I'm going to put you in touch with certain parties that . . . anything you want, *anything* . . . they'll give it to you. That's how much I think of you."

Everhard in critical silence reflected: "You're in Dutch with the gang, but have probably bragged as to how you could handle me. They've given you a chance, and if you don't make good, you're all through. And you know it."

Kurlingen was saying: "I'm in with some great men. And I'm going to give you . . . you got to take it!" That

was the old-time Kurlingen's voice. "The chance for millions. You, me, them!"

"One, two, three. Simple. Millions, eh?"

Kurlingen arose domineeringly. It was his old trick of seeming to force men to take the great favors he was offering. He swept aside all timid little hesitancies and questioning. High-pressure stuff. "Millions, boy!" he said and drove fist to palm. "You've played for big money. This is the biggest thing that ever—"

The telephone had been ringing, and now Mademoiselle Houlette knocked.

"Come in," said Everhard.

Mademoiselle Houlette spoke hurriedly: "Monsieur is called. A woman's voice says it is a matter of life and death, monsieur."

Everhard went quickly, thinking of Vilette. Mademoiselle closed the door behind him. He walked rapidly down the corridor to the telephone. She followed slowly and became suddenly concerned with linens in a closet—the better to overhear.

"Hello?"

A voice, not Vilette's, but also the kind that made you think the owner must be pretty, dress daintily, and move in an aura of heady perfume, asked, "This is Monsieur Donald Richmond?"

"So I've been told."

"Ah, monsieur, but this is serious! You do not know me—"

"Everything but your name, darling."

"Oh, please!"

"You," said Everhard impatiently, "are in a cabaret without money enough for the bill. No, I won't come . . . nor send it."

"Please! Please!" She was trying to be hysterical. "This is life and death, monsieur!" Very rapidly, as if to keep him from interrupting: "To-night I was at the Opéra, and in the box two men sat behind me, and during



the intermission they spoke Russian, no doubt thinking I could not understand them. Are you listening?"

"Yes, go on." He was a little curious as to why she would be lying over the telephone at this hour of the morning.

"I heard one give this number to the other, and I remembered it. I heard one say to the other, 'You will telephone this Monsieur Donald Richmond in the morning and he will meet you. You will then bring him to the place I told you of, and he will be taken care of.' The other laughed and said, 'Yes, with a knife to his throat!' Monsieur, I returned home and I could not sleep. I was so troubled that at last I decided I must telephone you so that—"

"Sweet of you. But if you've made a wager that I shall come in person to-morrow to thank you, why, pay it like a good sport! You see, dear, it wasn't Russian they spoke but Chinese. All my enemies are Chinese. Good-by and don't let it trouble your sleep."

"But monsieur, listen!" she screamed, really hysterical.

At that moment he heard a shot from the front room. In the half-instant's pause and sidelong jerk of head before he dropped the receiver, laughter, hysterical and triumphant, came through the telephone.

3

Mademoiselle Houlette, who was nearer the door than Everhard, threw it open, paused with backward jerk of angular body, horrified. Everhard roughly pushed by her, his hand shoulder-high under the dressing-gown.

Kurlingen lay sprawled in the massive chair, not a full arm's length from the heavy draperies that twitched in the draft at the sides of the open French windows. His body, with left hand adroop and hanging drunkenly, lay over against an arm of the chair. The smell of powder

was strong, and there was another smell, too. There was a blue-black hole near Kurlingen's right temple and the left side of his head had been blown away.

On the floor, slightly to the left of him, lay a big automatic as if it might have fallen from the down-reaching left hand.

The windows were tall. The draperies came to within a few inches of the floor. Everhard, turning quickly about, scrutinized the big room and peered below the bunched curtains, looking, not hopefully, for the feet and ankles of the quickly hidden murderer.

"He has killed himself?" said Mademoiselle Houlette, and the question was quite as if she commended Kurlingen for unexpected worthiness.

"His kind do it with food, booze, girls. He'd no more have shot himself than you can bite off your own nose." Everhard added quickly, with accusing stare, "Looks like you've won this pot."

"Whatever does monsieur mean?" She was still in the doorway.

"Yeah, I wonder!" he said turning about.

There were three doors opening into the big front room; one to the apartment hallway, where she now stood; one to the small seldom used dining-room beyond which lay the kitchen; one to his own room.

He went through the apartment, searching. In the kitchen he found the back door still locked, from the inside. He went into Houlette's room, looked in the closet, behind the door, under the bed. He took one room after another, even opening the big wood-box where logs and wire-bound faggots were stored for the fireplace.

As he came again into the front room, Mademoiselle Houlette, who appeared not to have moved from her tracks, exclaimed, "What do you do, monsieur?"

"I'm looking for a collar-button, of course." He eyed her tense angular, wrinkled face and felt it useless to point out to her that no one could have entered this apartment



or left furtively without her connivance. It did not seem even worth while to tell her that Kurlingen had been framed by a false message and come promptly at twelve o'clock; that the woman who spoke of Russians on the telephone had known the very moment to draw Everhard from the room on the plea of life and death, and that it was his automatic .45 that lay on the floor beside the dead Kurlingen. Everhard felt that Mademoiselle Houlette knew and understood all those little things ever so much better than he did. He was also quite sure that she would forget, and deny, that she knew Everhard was not in the room with Kurlingen when the shot was fired.

"Monsieur, it *must* be that he killed himself!"

"Of course." Everhard agreed quite as if he had never made any denial. "What makes you think he didn't? Call the police."

"The police, monsieur!"

"The police, mademoiselle. That is, unless you want to help me heave him out of the window into the Seine, clean up the bad spots, and say nothing to anybody."

"Oh monsieur! Then he has not killed himself?"

Everhard had the uneasy impression that she was about to throw herself against his breast and weep. Women, some women, were like that. After they help frame a man for a jam, they suddenly remember that he isn't, after all, such a bad fellow, and are sorry. And in spite of his suspicions all along, he had become rather fond of Houlette.

"Call the police, mademoiselle."

She moved, not with long-legged stride now. She moved with short slow steps and a backward look of unhappy perplexity. He watched, waiting for her to get out of the room.

4

The moment she was out of sight in the hallway, Everhard threw off the dressing-gown, not wanting its skirt trailing in the mess about Kurlingen's chair.

With handkerchief in hand, and moving with quick tiptoeing wariness, he stooped to the gun on the floor. It was, as he had guessed, one of his own guns. He knew his guns as a woman knows her jewels. He had put it away in a locked drawer of his room. No doubt his own fingerprints on the oil film had somehow been carefully preserved by the murderer. But Kurlingen had killed himself. That was, supposedly, Mademoiselle Houlette's idea in the matter, and Everhard meant to make it stick. He glanced toward the doorway. Her voice was at the telephone.

With one corner of the handkerchief about the gun's muzzle, he rubbed it all over, carefully. He pressed up the safety-catch with the edge of his thumb-nail.

Kurlingen had been shot in the right temple, point-blank. That was where Mr. Murderer had miscued. Had sneaked up too close. How he got so close without Kurlingen letting out a frightened bellow, Everhard could not imagine. He had played too much poker with Kurlingen not to know that he was right-handed.

Everhard pulled the dead man's right hand out at lax arm's length. He put the ball of Kurlingen's thumb firmly against the trigger, folded the four fingers overlappingly on the handle, pressed them firmly, and let Kurlingen's arm fall.

Still holding the muzzle by the handkerchief, he pushed the safety down with edge of his thumb-nail, and laid the gun on the floor, precisely where it had been. An odd place for a gun to have landed when it fell from a suicide's right hand, but that was where it had landed. Let the police figure it out as best they could.

Everhard bent forward, scrutinizing the big diamond-like stud; then recalling how Kurlingen had hastily thrust a small trinket back into his vest pocket while feeling for his cigarette-case, Everhard dipped finger and thumb into the pocket and found a platinum ring, fashioned into skull and cross-bones.



"Plain as dawn," said Everhard to himself, eying the ring quickly and thrusting it into his trouser pocket. "They were through with him anyhow. He had it coming. And so they used him as bad fish to bait the lobster trap for me. Now we shall see what we shall see."

## 5

Everhard, in his dressing-gown, with both hands deep in the side pockets, was sitting moodily on the table's corner when Mademoiselle Houlette returned.

"The police will come at once, monsieur."

He looked up, watching her. Her voice was low and hinted at being sorry for him. Her eyes were not so bright as ought to have been the eyes of one who had just helped put over a fast one on a trusting, unsuspecting fellow like himself.

"Mademoiselle, this is a very puzzling affair. Very. All we can do is to tell the police everything, just as it happened. One must always tell the truth, even to the police."

"Yes monsieur," she answered doubtfully.

"And mademoiselle," he said softly, with a twisted smile and a look that had made bolder persons than Houlette uneasy, "you please will not forget that we were both out of the room when the shot was fired."

"But oh, monsieur, how could I!"

"Mmm-hmm. It has been done. Don't you try it."

"What can monsieur mean?"

"Just that."

"Oh!" It was a gasp. Surprise flared up in her gray eyes. "Oh, monsieur cannot believe that I . . . I . . ."

"You what?"

". . . that I am not his friend!"

"Why, mademoiselle, whatever could have suggested to you that I do not trust you implicitly?" He smiled at her, very pleasantly, pleased to see that she looked baffled and a little frightened.

He looked at the floor, pointing, said: "And of course we must touch nothing, but that does look very much like one of my guns. So let us now go together and see if Kurlingen—who, as every one knows, was a sick man, badly worried over money—did not slip into my room and take the gun from the drawer while I was at the telephone listening to the sweet-voiced woman who tried to flirt at this odd hour of the morning."

He strode into the next room. She followed as if reluctant. The drawer was tightly closed, but unlocked. His shirts lay undisturbed in the corner of the drawer where he had placed the gun. With quick flip he rumbled and pushed them aside. Pointing as she came near, he said, "You see, the holster is empty."

"But ah, monsieur, how would he know where to look?"

"Oh, Kurlingen knew I always kept a gun about. And mademoiselle, it is very fortunate that my loving care of guns is such that I always—*always*, you understand?—wipe them carefully with a slightly oiled rag before I lay them away. You see, if any fingerprints are left it might bring on rust. Therefore Kurlingen's fingerprints, and his only, will show."

She looked rather dazed, as if confusedly struggling to understand; then with an eagerness like hope: "So he did kill himself, monsieur!"

"Oh, absolutely. No doubt of it," said Everhard, matter-of-factly.

The police might find a lot of loose ends dangling to the story, and smell an unsolved mystery; but Everhard thought that would be all right. At least he had broken down the frame-up—or badly cracked it.

The door-bell rang. Houlette said anxiously, "Monsieur, the police have come."

"All right, show them in."

As soon as her back was turned he went quickly to the closet and reached hurriedly to the inside pocket of a coat hanging there where he had left the two extra passports



in a stamped, carefully sealed envelop, ready for instant mailing at the nearest tobacconist to a fictitious name, care of the American Express.

He could not mail them now, but he wanted to get hold of them, and be ready somehow to ditch them if the police showed any intention of making a thorough search.

At best, it looked bad for Kurlingen to be dead in his apartment; and being caught with two or more passports would be almost as troublesome at any time as being caught with as many wives. The Parisian police, having much understanding of passional weaknesses, would listen more patiently to an explanation about the wives than about the passports—but know you were lying in either case.

Everhard groped hastily, drew out his wallet, bulky with big franc notes; but the envelop was gone.

## 6

Two policemen came into the front room. They were young, soldierly, with toy-like automatics in black flap holsters.

These two *agents* were like the advance scouts of an army that was soon to march up in full force. Madame Thurot was at their heels, much resembling a blowzy camp-follower with her too small peignoir over a flannel nightgown. Little Thurot appeared from behind her, as if he had come stealthily, sheltered by her bulk. He had been at Verdun, but peered at Kurlingen as if this were the first time he had ever seen a dead man, and made soft little sounds of astonishment and regret. Then he turned as if fleeing. More *gardiens de la paix* were coming. It would not do to have the police wait in the rain before the nail-studded doors. Madame Thurot shook her head sadly and said, "Bad, bad, very bad," in a low voice.

The two young *agents* laid aside their wet cloaks, took

out note-books. They calmly asked questions, carefully scribbled the answers, and seemed neither to believe nor disbelieve what they were told. They inspected, and retained, Everhard's passport; demanded Mademoiselle Houlette's card of identity. One went to the telephone. The other continued with questions. Everhard wished that some of the people who have an idea that the French are always excitable had been in his shoes.

More police came, some in uniform; detectives from the Sûreté. The detectives were the fellows Everhard dreaded. They were middle-aged, rather small, very gracious and sympathetic; they spoke low, moved quietly, and nodded as if believing everything they were told.

Mademoiselle Houlette was tensely calm, spoke freely, appeared truthful.

Everhard wondered why, and turned thoughtfully to the window. Rain splattered on the ledge. The Seine, sleepest of rivers, lay black and motionless. Far below, the lights of Kurlingen's waiting automobile threw dim blotches of light on the wet quay. Street lamps glowed hazily. A few taxicabs, like bright-eyed bugs scurrying out of the wet, fled across the bridges and disappeared.

The apartment was full of *agents*, then two more came. One was unimportant, being a kind of secretary. The other was most unwelcome to Everhard, being Monsieur Biradou. Every man turned toward him respectfully and stood as if at attention. Kurlingen, a notable figure in Paris, was dead. Monsieur Biradou had been notified. He had come. He gave Everhard one look—cold, aloof, full of what seemed to be most disagreeable meaning—then ignored him.

Biradou's eyes clicked. He questioned the *agents* with nervous rapidity, all the while glancing about as if not listening to what was said. Erect, trim, decisive. He seemed rather impatient because other men could not think as fast as he. He began to question Madame Thurot, who was frightened, and Mademoiselle Houlette, who



stuck to simple facts and told the truth. His questions jumped from one to the other, but he seemed to pay no attention to what they said.

Everhard knotted his hands deep in the pockets of his gown and guessed, "He knows more about what happened here than any of us."

Without even glancing at Everhard, Biradou demanded, "Monsieur, will you please tell what happened."

Everhard told just what had happened before Kurlingen was found dead.

"So he pretended that he thought you had invited him, eh?" Biradou was looking out the window. He appeared a little bored. His tone was icy. "The woman who telephoned—you do not know her?" Biradou walked away from the window. He bent over, looking at the automatic, but explained in a tone that sounded to Everhard very like irony: "Monsieur is such a man as interests certain ladies of Paris. They take various pretexts to arrange introductions." A flashing glance hit Everhard's eyes squarely. "Do you always tell the truth so readily?"

Everhard bowed. "Certainly, monsieur. To the police."

Biradou looked as if he wanted to say, "Bah!" Walking away: "This offer of his by which you were to make millions. What was the nature of it?"

"He did not say, monsieur. I was called to the phone."

"But you had plainly let him know you would have nothing to do with it," Biradou made the statement encouragingly, as if trying to lure an affirmative.

Everhard bowed, not speaking.

"Ah, so," said Biradou. "Let us see. Being ruined and in poor health, he knew, as you Americans say, that the jig was up. You left the room. He knew you owned a gun. But why, monsieur, do you go armed in Paris?"

"An old permit, if you please. Issued during the war, monsieur."

"The war happens to be over," said Biradou. Many of the *agents* smiled discreetly. Biradou spun about on his

heel, shot question and glance with tremendous impact: "If he shot himself, the fingerprints would indicate it, would they not?"

Everhard said mildly, "I am not very familiar with such things, but I presume so."

"Then," said Biradou, irritably, "the gun shall be examined at once!" It sounded to Everhard just as if Biradou had said, "That'll cinch you!"

He crossed the room again, stooped, took Kurlingen's left hand, touched the third finger; then instantly and accurately his glance struck Everhard's eye. He did not expect Kurlingen to be wearing the ring, but with significant pantomime was asking a question.

The answer he got was just about the same as if across a green baize table he had asked Everhard what cards he held.

He dropped the hand, straightened erectly, shot one of those direct quick glances at Mademoiselle Houlette, as if not at all pleased with her, then, addressing no one in particular: "Very simple. No doubt at all, Monsieur Richmond has told the truth." To Everhard's alert ear that sounded a wee bit mocking. "Have the gun examined and fingerprints compared. Monsieur is to be regarded as the victim of an unlucky circumstance—until then."

He bowed coldly to Everhard, with uplifted searching eyes; then went away abruptly, followed by the secretarial person, and somehow left behind him the impression that he had been summoned about a trifle; that it was bad, too bad, other men couldn't see things for themselves without troubling him, especially as he had matters of importance on hand.

## 7

The city was beginning to stir. From a side street below there came the slow *clack-clack* of heavily shod horses on the wood-block pavement, and the jingle of sleigh-



bells. The garbage wagons were abroad and the bells warned the concierges to get their cans outside—if they were the heartless kind of concierges who kept their cans indoors, away from the queer human maggots, the *chiffonniers*, that ransack rubbish in the early dawn.

The attitude of the *agents* changed. They were extremely cautious and careful. Everhard was not left alone a half-second. Some went away, others came. Among them reporters. Everhard, gambler and rum pirate, was back on the front page. But reporters in Paris do not dare cut such capers as in America: the police step on enterprising meddlers in a murder case or suicide. Photographs were taken of the room. The automatic was carried away in an exhibit case. (Months were to pass before it was returned.) Everhard's fingerprints were inked. Kurlingen's and Mademoiselle Houlette's also. It seemed as if the body would never be removed.

There was a crowded coming and going on the stairs until noon. A shiny-eyed bald little man with an escort of clerks came, almost cheerfully. He told Everhard proudly that Monsieur Biradou had been, as usual, right. It was suicide. Now they would have an inquest. It seemed an unending inquest. All the stories were repeated, but now without suspicious examination.

Everhard thought the fleeting expression on the angular face of the long-legged Houlette, when she heard that Kurlingen's fingerprints, very perfectly, were on the gun, was most interesting. Something like that of the hypothetical man who swallows an oyster for the first time.

At last Everhard shook hands at the doorway with the little shiny-eyed man who had a slippery portfolio under his arm. He was cheerily sympathetic, asked Everhard's pardon for the trouble he had been put to, and with shrug, gesture, and two words, expressed his opinion of a man so discourteous as to kill himself in the apartment of another.

## Chapter Fourteen

### 1

EVERHARD went to Mademoiselle Houlette's room, did not knock, but flung the door wide and stepped in.

She turned quickly from a half-opened drawer and exclaimed reproachfully, "Monsieur!"

"The show's over. So stop acting."

"Monsieur forgets that I do not understand English."

"Unless you hear it through the keyhole?"

"Oh, can monsieur believe that I—"

"Monsieur can, sister, so come clean. It may look a bit nasty to have another suicide here so soon. However, I understand how such things are arranged. By this time you know that."

"But I am monsieur's friend."

"So was Kurlingen. See what happened to him."

"But monsieur!"

"And a package addressed for mailing was removed from my coat."

"Oh!"

"Oh yes. And the person who took the gun did not take it."

"Oh! But how can monsieur know that?"

"Because a wallet was in the same pocket—and remained. He would have taken the wallet."

"Ah."

"Only you, mademoiselle, of all the people in Paris, have had the chance to go through my pockets or look under my pillow when I was at the bath. Only you knew that I carried such a package ready for mailing. It is



sealed carefully, so you did not venture to tamper. But last night you thought I would think it had been stolen by whoever killed Kurlingen. And you were curious. You should have been less honest and taken the wallet too. My package, mademoiselle, if you please!" Everhard held out his hand.

Her face grew red, her lips trembled a little. She fumbled with the buttons on her flat breast. "It is not as you think, monsieur." But her hand drew out the envelop.

"But you see it is precisely as I think. Thank you."

He examined the flap carefully. The envelop had not been opened.

"Oh monsieur," she said quickly, and gestured pleadingly, "when I saw the man was dead, I knew the police must come. While monsieur searched the apartment I took what monsieur had been so careful to keep concealed ready for mailing. I hid it. I was afraid monsieur would forget."

"So thoughtful. Why did you not want the police to find it?"

"Because I am monsieur's friend. I was afraid it might embarrass him if it fell into the wrong hands."

"You could not have spoken to me, remindingly?"

"That would have made monsieur know that I had spied on him. Monsieur, please, you believe me?"

"Oh, indeed, mademoiselle! Every word you say. You would not deceive me, would you?"

"I am monsieur's friend."

"Then who the hell planted you on me?"

"'Planted,' monsieur?"

"Planted, mademoiselle."

"Oh, dear monsieur, please do not believe that I am as you think!"

"Ah, sweet mademoiselle, please do not believe that I am so much the fool as you think. You won't talk?"

"No, monsieur. I—"

By the look in her eyes he could tell that she was go-

ing to say some more about being his friend; so he caught her wrist, jerked her arm, twisted. She cried out, hurt, indignant, begging. He twisted until she writhed about with her back to him. He caught the other arm and twisted both until the backs of her hands were pressed together behind her. He pushed her ahead of him, not gently. Quite before she realized what was happening, she was thrust into her closet. He slammed the door to and turned the key.

## 2

Everhard at once went down to the concierge's little apartment just inside the wide cobblestoned entrance. Madame Thurot's door was open. She, bulkily overflowing the chair, was peeling potatoes in the front room, the better to see every one who passed and talk with them of the tragedy. She laid aside the potato, but gestured with the knife as she clucked sympathetically. It was very like a mother hen welcoming a wet gosling under her warm wings.

Everhard gazed at her reproachfully. "Ah madame, I thought you were my friend. But oh, how one should trust nobody!"

"*Hé!* What do you say, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame. The woman Houlette is not madame's cousin. No, she cannot be, for the woman Houlette is a thief."

"Thief! Oh my God, you say *thief?*" She turned her face upward and thrust up her enormous arms, waving the knife. "Monsieur says *thief!*" She groaned loudly.

"Perhaps madame can explain why she told me the Houlette was a cousin?"

"Why, it was Monsieur Biradou himself—oh my God, monsieur! What do I say!"

"You but say, madame, that Monsieur Biradou himself asked you to adopt the Houlette as a cousin. And



why, oh why, madame, did Monsieur Biradou say he wanted to put a police spy in my apartment?"

"How wretched I am!" She brandished the knife feebly.

"Please, madame, do not blame yourself. One can refuse nothing to the police."

"You are kind, monsieur. But they told me it was necessary to watch out for you because in America you had done some things that were not right. I cannot believe that, monsieur. You are such a nice gentleman. Even that wretched Houlette has said so."

"Ah madame, thank you. But, you see, possibly they have mistaken me for some one else. In America so many people have the same name and look alike. And you, madame, have been so kind to me that I shall never tell any one that you have confided with me Monsieur Biradou's secret. However, I must let him know that his Houlette is not to be trusted. You see how honest I am, madame, to notify Monsieur Biradou that the spy he has set to watch me is unworthy of his confidence?"

"Oh yes, monsieur! Every one knows that you are a gentleman." Her voice was extremely sincere as her pudgy hand closed on the hundred-franc note.

3

Returning up the stairs, Everhard was near the landing of his own floor when with casual lift of glance he saw the black heavy skirt of a priest. Lifting the glance still higher, he saw that the priest's head was bowed under the broad flat brim of his hat and that a handkerchief was pressed, as if sorrowfully, against one side of his face. Everhard made way, letting the priest have the inside of the stairs; but when he was one step below, Everhard put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Pardon, but let us talk, Monsieur Guyot!"

The concealing hand with its handkerchief dropped from the priest's face. The man sucked in his breath with

an unpleasant sound of hissing. His surprise passed quickly and he said severely, "Monsieur, I am *Père* Guyot, and have just visited my unfortunate brother, whose life has been unworthy of our parents; and he is now near death."

"How sad!"

"If you doubt, monsieur, I shall return with you, and you may ask the sinful woman who calls herself Madame Guyot, and who has brought about my brother's ruin." He again put the handkerchief to his face as if sorrowing greatly for the sinful brother.

"She being a wicked woman, Father, would perhaps lie," Everhard suggested.

"Thank you, monsieur, for understanding my grief."

He made as if to go on, but Everhard caught at his shoulder again, turning him around. "I must tell you, Father, that I somehow begin to suspect that I know the sinful woman better than I thought I did. You are right, she is very wicked. And understands Russian, does she not? But come, Mademoiselle Houlette is much more to be trusted. Let us talk with her."

"Use caution, monsieur! This is an outrage!"

"I am extremely cautious, Father. Always."

Menace came into the other's tone and look. "I am a priest, and the police shall be informed!"

"How very well we get on together! I, too, was just thinking that they should be informed."

The priest's black eyes gleamed, the lips curled into a toothy sneer. "Beware, monsieur!"

"Of what, if you please?"

"I have powerful friends."

"How fortunate you are! But come with me," said Everhard.

The priest jumped from under Everhard's hand, starting to run. An agile, wiry fellow, who had no doubt often darted away from grasping hands. Now his own hands clutched at the skirt of his heavy gown, lifting it.



In two jumps Everhard was upon him, and the muzzle of his gun fell on the low round crown of the broad-brimmed black hat with a crashing blow. Everhard caught him up before Guyot, unconscious, fell; and slinging him over a shoulder, remounted the stairs and entered his own apartment.

Everhard let the man slide to the floor and searched under the black gown for something oddly lumpish that had pressed when the weight was on his back. A knotted rope was wound about Guyot. Everhard also found a small automatic. Perhaps Guyot would say that he had carried rope and gun into the presence of the sinful brother as symbols of what awaits the wicked if they continue on the wayward path.

Everhard took other things off him too—much money and a few letters, none of interest. But he found no ring or anything hinting at *La Tête de Mort*, which was disappointing, since the fact made Guyot seem a smaller fish than Everhard had hoped.

It grew tiresome waiting for the man to come around. Everhard suspected that he was shamming, hopeful of a chance to scramble out of the door; so he took Guyot by the feet, dragged him into the kitchen, drew a pan of water, and let it go. The fellow came to life with a splutter of curses, wiping at face and eyes with his sleeve.

"So you are so well known for a rogue," said Everhard, "that you must wear a disguise when the police are on the stairs?"

"You'll pay for this!" the impostor screamed.

"No doubt! Monsieur Biradou, being an artist, will perhaps never forgive me for humiliating him with the discovery that Kurlingen did not commit suicide, but was murdered."

"If you know when you are well off, let me go, you ——." He called Everhard a "cow" among other things, as well as a "camel."

"Stand up."

The man arose sullenly.

"Face about."

He sneered, but did as told, not wanting two bumps on his head.

"Move along."

Everhard took him into Houlette's room, stood him before the closet, and opened the door. Houlette peered out, blinking at the light. Her eyes were red and her cheeks streaked, but she was not now crying.

"Why, it is Monsieur Guyot!" She appeared to wonder that he should be in clerical dress.

"I thought so too, and wished your opinion. He appears to have taken holy orders, and now will no doubt stop swearing at Madame Guyot."

Guyot said things that showed he had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"What can this mean, monsieur?" She asked it as if quite innocently amazed.

"A knotted rope was about his waist. His face not only looks like a monkey's, but he has the same agile body. Since Kurlingen shot himself, no one can doubt that. I guess that Guyot swung down from the window above and gave him the gun. And the whole truth, mademoiselle, is that I think you gave it to Guyot."

"As God is sleepless, I did not!"

"The devil also is sleepless, and you did. Back into your closet!"

"But monsieur!"

"Will you deny that you were put in here to spy on me?"

"But I am not a friend to this man." She thrust out her long arm at Guyot as if it were a sword.

"Perhaps you will also tell me that you still believe Kurlingen killed himself. Into your closet. And have no fear. I shall notify the great Monsieur Biradou—"

At that she displayed unsuspected emotion. She stared



aghast. Tears ran out of her eyes. She lifted an arm pleadingly and let it fall as if aware the gesture would do no good. "Oh, I am ruined," she sobbed.

"In you go!" said Everhard. In she went, with the flat of his hand against her shoulder. He shut the door and turned the key.

He looked Guyot over. A bad egg. He had impudence, and no doubt it passed for courage among his friends.

"If you have any lies you'd like to tell, get going!" said Everhard. "The closet in my room is quite as strong as this."

"Monsieur," the fellow began glibly, as if talking things over with an equal, "if you are wise, you will have nothing more to do with this affair. The fool police have said suicide. Nothing is to be gained for yourself but trouble if you do not let the matter drop. I am more your friend than you think."

"Ah yes. You go about making people appear guilty of horrible crimes in order to befriend them. Is that it? Quite an original idea."

"Monsieur, I swear that good was intended for you!" He seemed earnest about it, and his eyes blazed hopefully.

"Pah!"

He bent forward with a chopping gesture, eagerly. "It is true!"

"You lie."

"No no! If I were permitted to speak but two words I could make you believe."

"I give permission. Let us hear the two words."

Evidently Guyot was impulsively tempted to blurt out something of his secret, but must have remembered that men got their throats cut for less; and so shook his head. "But believe me, monsieur!"

"You pay me the doubtful honor of thinking I am a bigger fool than ever any man thought before."

"And you will be," said Guyot, growing vicious again, "if you meddle with the affairs of my friends by giving me to the police."

"Yes?"

Guyot had turned sour, looked ugly, sneered. "I gave you the chance to be on the safe side, so now the devil take you!" He tried to laugh warningly. "He-he-he!"

"Sounds like a chicken with the pip," said Everhard, and laid hold of an ear. "Come along. I have no more time to waste, because now that you are to be safely out of the way, I shall visit Madame Guyot. You gave her permission once to entertain me—while you were in England. So now you won't mind, I'm sure."

From what Guyot said, and kept saying even after being put into the closet, together with the way he beat and kicked on the door, it appeared that he did mind.

4

Everhard went to the floor above and rang the bell. In a minute or two he was pleased to hear a honied voice say, with just a trace of uncertainty, "What is it, please?"

Everhard had no great confidence in himself when he tried to pretend to be somebody else; still, one can but try. He tried the tone of the little concierge Thurot, saying, "A telegram for monsieur."

A bolt slipped. The door opened a crack. A dark eye peeked through—and Everhard's shoulder gave a surging push. Pretty little Madame Guyot of the warm luring eyes was knocked backward. She cried out and staggered against the wall behind her. Everhard went in, kicking the door to. She, huddled against the wall with wide-spread fingers pressing at arm's length behind her for support, stared speechless.

She didn't have on enough clothes to get by anywhere but in the Folies-Bergère final tableau or as an ad in some woman's magazine. There was a mere wispy sug-



gestion of lace frills, a bit of pink-ribbon knots, a trace of sheer silk, and much perfume.

"Your husband has gone again to England, madame?"

And she said, "Monsieur!" Tone, look, and one hasty word conveyed: "I am amazed but not quite angry, since you appear to be a gentleman and have made a mistake that is incomprehensible to me; but no doubt you will apologize at once and withdraw; whereupon I shall be pleased to pardon you, for, after all, you are really an attractive, nice-looking man." French maidens are by no means always charming when they are reproachful; but they can, when they wish, mingle insidious flattery with indignation. They know men are brutes, but they know how to handle brutes.

"You have won your bet, madame. You see, here I come in person to thank you for warning me against those dreadful Russians."

A moment's perplexity shadowed her eyes and passed. Her lips smiled faintly. With a huddling movement she seemed to gather an invisible garment about her, modestly. She took a deep breath hurriedly, and moistened the pretty red lips with a red tongue's tip. She perhaps had not often flirted with poker-players; for though she was not without experience and charm, she didn't seem to know quite what to do.

"Ah, monsieur is so clever!" She sighed and smiled, as when one must surrender, trustfully.

"And madame so beautiful and young to be involved in murder."

"Murder!"

"Oh yes, murder, madame. Your husband, having taken the priest's garb, has just eased his conscience by confession."

"Monsieur misunderstands. I am Mademoiselle Guyot. Monsieur is my brother."

Everhard bowed respectfully to such a delicate way of making a difficult situation easy.

"You say that he h-has confessed? To the police, monsieur?"

"I am not of the police, madame."

"'Mademoiselle,' if you please. It is to you he has confessed, monsieur?" She put out her hand in a timid trusting gesture.

"And I have locked him in my closet."

"But monsieur!" Her dainty hands fluttered pleadingly, like little frightened birds looking for a place to light. "The death of such a man is no crime. Besides, I swear I knew nothing of what was intended."

"You swear it, do you?"

"I swear it! You believe me, dear monsieur? And oh, why try to call it a crime when the police have said it was suicide? Ah, monsieur, be reasonable, please!"

"By all means, madame, do let us be reasonable."

She stamped a silk-sheathed slippered foot. "'Mademoiselle'!"

"Monsieur Biradou will know which it is. I shall give you to him."

"Never! I will not go!" Fifi Guyot was defiant, but not at all ugly about it, and she did not lose a subtly hinted readiness to forgive his bad manners—and stupidity.

"Madame, I shall take you—forcibly, if need be. You may scream. The police will then come more quickly."

Fifi peered and meditated; then, suspiciously submissive: "You are strong." A trembling sigh. "It shall be as you say. I go now to my room and put on a dress."

"Let us go together."

"Monsieur, you would force yourself into my boudoir!"

"Ah no, never! But you will invite me. I shall accept. Then you can't possibly be offended, for what man could refuse?"

Sunlit trembling smiles and dark shadowy frowns twitched across her face as if laughter and anger played tag with her feelings. Her eyes narrowed in a doubtful scrutiny, then a queer little smile got hold of her reluctant



lips, and she shrugged her shoulders. "Monsieur, you are very clever!"

She went into her room. Everhard paused at the open door and opened his coat, touching the automatic's handle as if to make sure that it was there. He wanted her to see; otherwise it might be like her to snatch up a knife and fly at him.

"Monsieur lacks courage?" she inquired amiably.

"But not caution, madame."

Again the shrug. "You are stupid and not kind."

She moved gracefully across the room and stopped before a mirror, peered into it, touching her fluffy curls with both hands, and seemed to wonder what was wrong, that he did not notice that she was beautiful. Her glance came out of the mirror, challengingly, then shifted. She picked up an atomizer. With the unconscious gesture of habit she sprayed perfume at her throat, turning her head this way and that to get it behind her ears. She opened a small drawer and took out a nail-buffer, swept it across her fingers two or three times and tossed it at the drawer. From another drawer she took beads and hung them about her neck. She had been watching him in the mirror, but now turned and smiled timidly, as if trying to be still hopeful.

"Quick, madame."

"Yes, monsieur. You will take me to the police?"

"Of course."

"Monsieur is such an honest man that if he found a nice jewel he would at once take it to the police, eh?"

"Most certainly—if I knew it was phony."

Fifi's staring look broke slowly into a smile, and with shake of fluffy head she murmured, "You believe that of *me*?"

"Oh come on, hurry up."

She said humbly: "You are cruel. One were better dead than to hope for kindness from you. You will really take me to the police?"

"Yes."

A long trembling sigh heaved at her breast. It was such a sigh as had to be seen and heard. She turned with lingering gaze and went slowly to her closet. She reached up and took down a dress on its hanger, looked at it doubtfully, glanced toward him, and pitched it across the bed. She stepped into the closet. Her back was still visible as she reached up, clicking the hangers along the rod, searching. She stepped out of sight.

There was the report of a small-caliber gun. A sharp fire-cracker snap of sound. Her body swayed backward and collapsed inside the closet door, and a little gun of the type made for women's handbags and men's vest pockets fell on the floor just outside the closet door.

"You damn little fool!" said Everhard and ran to her. He had had quite enough of suicides for one day. She lay in a crumpled heap. He bent over her, kneeled, pulled an arm back, and in the closet dimness stared at the little black powder-burned hole in the lacy wisp of brassière, on the left side of her breast. A small red spot showed under the black hole. Her eyes in the unlighted closet were staringly wide as if at the last instant of life she had seen what lay beyond.

He touched her breast gently with caressing inquiring finger-tips, then ran his fingers deep into her soft curly hair, and arose, pulling.

She squealed with pain. Her hands clutched at his hand. Her feet flew in scrambling kicks. "Oh, monsieur, please! You hurt . . . you hurt me!" She swore at him.

He let go of her hair and she came to her feet like a pretty little animal that wants to fight. He laughed at her. With up-heave of shoulder and toss of head she turned away, and went to the mirror.

"Beast!" she said, meaning it. She bent forward, looking at herself, and pettishly combed at her hair. "No gentleman would have done that!" Fifi Guyot was quite as angry as a pretty hostess detected cheating at cards.



"You palmed that toy cleverly. Permit one who knows something of the art to compliment you."

"The devil take you!" She would not look at him, not even in the mirror.

"You played it so perfectly that I am sure the little trick has taken in many gentlemen, and made them eager to settle with Monsieur Guyot and avoid scandal."

A thoughtful stare frowned at him. She did not like having her secrets so well understood.

"If I had run to call the concierge, you would have slipped into a dress and vanished."

Fifi sullenly busied herself with toilet trinkets, not interested in what he said. No reason for being; he but repeated what she already knew:

"Madame, permit one who knows something of gunshot wounds to offer a little technical advice. I suggest that after you have pulled the brassière aside and shot your blank into it, do not then dab the fake bullet-hole on your breast with rouge. Bullet-holes are small and black. Also, to attain perfection, you must learn that when one has been shot through the heart the pulse is no longer noticeable. Many gentlemen are too excited at such a time to think of those things, but I didn't want to lose you. And see, a miracle, madame!"

"*'Mademoiselle,'*" she murmured coolly.

Her deft fingers untied the brassière and tossed it aside. She took chamois and rubbed out the rouge spot, then lifted a big powder-puff from its box and dusted face, throat, and breast. She opened a drawer, lifted up a wispy spider web with ribbon knots entangled in the mesh and fastened it over her breast.

Fifi then took up the dress that had been flung on the bed, slipped it over her head, pulled it down about her hips, shook herself, smoothed the breast and returned to the mirror. She brushed and fluffed her hair.

She left the mirror and went straight to Everhard,

standing close. "Monsieur," she said sweetly, but with firmness, "I am not going to the police."

"No?"

"No, monsieur. Because to the police I will tell nothing; but to you I will tell whatever you ask and whatever you say. I know when I am beaten, monsieur."

"Tell it all!"

"All? Everything? Hm? All right. You see—" she held out her hand, fingers stiff and back to her, studying the nails—"when my brother saw you and Kurlingen together in the automobile, he said to me, 'Fifi, now I know how we can kill our enemy, this Kurlingen.' And he told me. But I said, 'No no! Monsieur Richmond is too charming a man!'" She lifted soft eyes. "You believe me, monsieur?"

"Not a damn word."

She regarded him with pretty insolence, somehow drawing nearer, a yearning promise in her eyes, plainly as if speaking aloud, saying: "Come, don't be a fool. All this is trivial. There is only one important question. Ask if I love you, and I shall say yes."

"Why was I framed?"

"Do you think I would have let them really find you guilty of murder? No no no!"

"How did he get that gun?"

"Through the window, two nights ago. You were not at home and the servant was in her room. He took nothing else, for fear you would miss things and find the gun gone."

"Such self-control must have pained him greatly."

"Last night it was covered with oiled paper to keep off the rain. It was fired and thrown through the window into the room. Kurlingen was almost in the window when my brother shot him. And oh how wet he was when he came back last night!"

"That is all?"



"Everything! Now, please, you tell me why the stupid police called it suicide."

"You see, Kurlingen, as he was dying, drew his gun and fired. The shot went through the window. His gun fell to the floor. When I saw two guns on the floor, I simply picked up my own and put it away."

"But I did not hear two shots." She spoke daintily of murder, quite as untroubled as if she talked of discarding old shoes.

"You are going to hear something now that will interest you, Fifi. Listen. I have talked with Kurlingen. With Mademoiselle Houlette. With your beautiful brother. They have told me things. But I am going to say—and it will be in the papers—that it was the pretty little Fifi Guyot who told me Kurlingen was murdered by La Tête de Mort."

The blood went out of her face like rouge wiped away. She clutched toward Everhard, wanting something to hold to, and trying to beg. "You . . . that? You will do that?" The words were whispered, and strained as if a hand were on her throat. Black eyes, abjectly begging, pleaded in terror. "No no no, monsieur! Not that!"

"Then come through. Tell it all and I'll cover you up. Otherwise, you haven't a chance."

"But they will kill me!"

She had shown Everhard how so many times that he now tried shrugging a shoulder.

Then little Fifi Guyot, an artful badger, shot the works, told it all. Probably for one of the few times in her life she let go of the truth, or even tried. But she could name no names. She did not know who had given her and Guyot orders to move into the house, watch Everhard, try what good looks would do toward getting acquainted; but she admitted they came from the Death's Head.

"Didn't my servant give you tips? She was in the game too."

"One doesn't always know who is a friend and who isn't. But the man Kurlingen was picked to die in your room and with your gun. Guyot stole your gun—"

"Being careful to protect my fingerprints?"

"More so to protect his own. And Kurlingen did draw his gun too? How you do have good luck, monsieur!"

"Yes, as you say, I do have good luck. You are so pretty and innocent! How was I to know that you really wanted to be friends with me? I could not think that so charming a woman would even pretend to like me."

The next moment Fifi Guyot was hanging on his neck. She, apparently forgiven, started a new deal then and there—as if trying to asphyxiate him with highly scented powder, hectic perfume, and flame-tipped lips.

He pulled at her arms and pushed, saying: "You are merely pretending now."

She said that she wasn't; he said that she was; she said she wasn't; and he said, "Prove it." She, all breathless and eager, with upturned mouth and warm glow of eyes, whispered, "How?"

"Tell your La Tête de Mort—"

"Oh!" She gasped as if soused with icy water. The very name made her flinch. Sweet Fifi did not mind playing the devil's game, but she did not like to hear the devil's name.

"Tell your La Tête de Mort that you and I have become dear friends. You don't greatly love your 'brother,' do you? No, of course not. A brother should not swear at one. Only a lover has such privileges. And ah, little Fifi, with my technical knowledge of gun-shot wounds and your art at suicide, what can we not do together, eh?"

Fifi hastily gathered her jewelry, slipped some filmy things into a light case, tucked her curls under a hat, slipped into her best fur coat, said she had never really loved anybody before, and left the house—carrying a bundle of Everhard's francs.

He did not trust her, but did not greatly care. If she



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happened to play faithful long enough to go through with a little badger-game trap, fine! La Tête de Mort would see whether or not Everhard was a bold tricky fellow, quite willing to play a dirty game.

## Chapter Fifteen

### 1

AS SOON as Fifi Guyot left the house, Everhard decided that the best thing he could do was to tuck himself away quietly in other quarters for a while and see how much of a rumpus Monsieur Biradou kicked up at finding Mademoiselle Houlette and Monsieur Guyot in the closets.

He went to his rooms, took a "pneumatique" out of the table drawer, and wrote to Monsieur Biradou at the Prefecture, telling him whom he would find in the closets, and that Guyot had confessed. He said that Mademoiselle Houlette had been more stubborn. He also informed Biradou that urgent business required that he, Everhard, leave at once for Belgium.

Everhard then walked out of the house and at the first tobacconist mailed the "pneumatique"—which is the same as a special-delivery would be in America if special-deliveries were delivered with any special alacrity.

He crossed the bridge to the Pont Marie Metro. He knew that he had been followed and shadowed everywhere previously, but he did not mean to be to-day.

At the first subway stop, waiting until the train was about to start again, he hastily got out. And right at his heels came a little shopkeeping sort of chap who also lingered on the platform as if he were waiting for the next train.

The next train came. Everhard moved toward the door. So did the shopkeeping chap. They were shoulder to shoulder. Everhard gave him a shove and stepped back. The door closed. The train started up. The chap was on



it, peering back through a window with a look that showed his heart was in his mouth.

Everhard went to the street and took a taxi. He went to Old England, bought a misfit suit of clothes, some pink shirts, purple ties, a cheap suitcase, and a horn-rimmed pair of glasses.

He changed taxis two or three times, and changed clothes in one of them. When he arrived at a second-class pension near the Luxembourg, he had an outstretched neck, one shoulder padded higher than the other, and the passport of Harold Robinson, a newspaper correspondent, who spoke French slowly, with difficulty. In filling out the police questionnaire he stated that he had just arrived from Brussels. He went to his room and, after a bath, stayed there, playing solitaire, and cheated shamelessly to make things come right.

The next morning a slovenly maid came with lukewarm coffee that was half watered milk, stale butter, and soggy rolls. He gave the tray one look and said: "Mademoiselle, I never take breakfast. I am sorry you have been put to this trouble."

She said it was no trouble, and that she would speak to the manager, because if one did not take breakfast the tariff would be three francs less per day, "which, monsieur, is something."

She went out and fifteen minutes later was back, saying that Monsieur Robinson had been asked for on the telephone.

"Some other Robinson. I'm a stranger"

"Monsieur Harold Robinson, if you please, who arrived yesterday from Brussels."

"Ah yes. That would be my dear old uncle. Tell him to leave the number, and I'll call."

She went out and Everhard looked thoughtfully at nothing. He felt that somehow he was up a tree. He knew that he had not been followed. How the devil had he been spotted?

The manager came himself, urgently. "Monsieur, the party holds the line and no one can use the telephone until you have talked."

"Man or woman?"

"Gentleman, monsieur."

Everhard went downstairs to the office and picked up the dangling receiver of the wall telephone. "Hello!"

A crisp sharp voice inquired: "Monsieur Harold Robinson?"

"You've guessed it."

"Monsieur, I wish to thank you for the private communication received yesterday. You are an amazing fellow. But be careful, be very careful, monsieur! Good-by, monsieur."

"Wait a minute. Who the devil are you?"

"Biradou."

There was a click. Everhard hung up and scratched his lower lip. He saw the manager eying him suspiciously, as if about to say something. Everhard beat him to it. "I'm leaving. Make out my bill. And don't make the customary mistakes. I want three francs off—"

"Impossible! I received no notification until this morning. The tray was served."

"Three francs off!"

"Impossible!"

The preliminary to every good argument in French is for each to repeat the same statement until one of the parties weakens into some sort of variation; then you jump in and talk so fast he can't interrupt. Everhard forgot that he spoke French slowly, with difficulty; and presently a bewildered sour-faced manager rudely thrust out an itemized bill, with three francs deducted for the breakfast—and ten added for a bath.

Everhard grinned and paid without comment.



## 2

Everhard changed back into his dark double-breasted suit, and left suitcase and new finery with the slovenly maid as a present for her sweetheart.

Biradou had certainly put the kibosh, and in a hurry, on the plan to stay in hiding for a few days. He had spotted Everhard through the police questionnaire, of course; but how the devil had he known to look out for "Harold Robinson"? Houlette had never opened the envelop. Everhard believed that the only person who knew about his passports was James. Yet Biradou had nailed him.

"That fellow *must* be as smart as he looks," mused Everhard. Anyhow, he had learned in a hurry precisely what he wanted to know: Biradou was not going to make trouble because of what had happened to his Houlette and to Guyot. And apparently he was not going to injure his own reputation by letting it be known that he had made a mistake about Kurlingen. "When you play with La Tête de Mort, you do queer things. And I'll bet Biradou is higher up in the game than little Cluckee would admit. That warning to be careful, be very careful, has an ominous sound. But damn good advice."

## 3

Madame Thurot's big full moon of a face glowed with news. She gave him a wink that would have cracked a walnut. "Mademoiselle Houlette's brother has met with an accident and it was necessary for her to return at once to her village. From the tear-marks on her face, how she must have loved her brother!"

"So sorry," said Everhard, and returned the wink. "And Monsieur Biradou?"

"Oh, la la la! He himself came suddenly and permitted no one to accompany him on the stairs, but took all keys. He returned holding that Guyot by the arm."

"And Madame Guyot?"

The worthy concierge shrugged her fleshy shoulders. "No one has seen her. No honest person, possibly excepting the police, could want to see her. *La salope!*" Which means a sloven and worse.

Everhard thought, "Fifi Guyot may have been worse, but she was no sloven."

He found the apartment in a mess. The front room rug was gone; the marks of muddy feet were everywhere; cigarette stubs and stink all about. He began getting things ready to move for a time into a hotel.

The telephone rang. "Allo. Monsieur Richmond? . . . One moment, please."

At the end of several moments another voice came over the wire; and Everhard stiffened a little. This second voice had quality, smoothness, strength; the enunciation was precise, not affected, and was somehow sinister. "Monsieur Richmond?"

"Yes."

"Will monsieur pardon the impertinence of a personal question?"

"Who's talking?"

"One who unfortunately has not the honor of knowing monsieur. But if monsieur insists upon a name . . ." The speaker paused, implying that names were plentiful.

"What's the question?"

"Permit me to inquire if Monsieur Richmond does not have in his possession a trifling bit of jewelry that does not belong to him."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Ah, if monsieur does not understand, then I am answered. He does not have anything that belonged to the man Kurlingen."

"Oh, you mean that ring?"

"Ah, thank you. You will return it upon demand and accept a slight reward?"



"I suppose so, since as you say, it really isn't mine. But I'd rather pay the reward and keep it."

"Why, monsieur?" The voice was suspicious.

"I look at pictures. I never saw anything finer, merely as art. The ring is fine. The miniature a treasure. There's greatness in it."

"You think it beautiful?"

"What the devil has beauty to do with art?" said Everhard. "And this is art. No greater artist ever lived than the one who got the sweep of a canvas into the space of a centime, and put Kurlingen's portrait there."

"You are enthusiastic?" The voice was not displeased.

"Did the man Kurlingen tell you something of this ring?"

"Not a word. I didn't find it until he was dead."

"Ah. The man Kurlingen killed himself?"

"So the police say," Everhard answered promptly.

"And you, monsieur, did not offer the police any suggestions that would give them another opinion?"

Everhard didn't dare say yes, and didn't dare say no; so he demanded: "Who the devil are you? And why all this questioning? I am not in habit of telling things to strangers, particularly over the phone. Since you have asked about the ring, which I showed to no one and did not mention, you probably have a right to ask questions. But as for anything else, I'm not talking."

"Ah, monsieur chooses to be evasive?"

"You're damn right monsieur does—over the telephone—to a stranger!"

The voice laughed a little, slightly amused, not displeased, almost approving. "Thank you, monsieur."

That was all. A click. The phone was dead.

Everhard frowned and talked silently to himself: "That's not so good. He's somebody away up high in the scheme of things, and more than half-way suspects I'm not on the up-and-up. No, not so good. Still, all art critics have ears like mine—get by by repeating what they've

heard. And that fellow sort of liked being told the ring was big-time stuff. Maybe I did squirm through . . . and maybe I didn't."

## 4

Everhard asked Madame Thurot to get hold of another "cousin," male preferred, to put the apartment to rights; said he would return in a few days.

He went to the Hotel Xerich, on the Champs-Élysées, and scarcely had time to turn around twice in the two nice rooms and bath, when the office told him that Mademoiselle Jeanne Colbert waited in the lounge.

"Lord, Cluckee! you are a fast worker! I just got here myself."

She smiled, not quite happily, gave him her gloved hand, and he, without a flicker, palmed the note she offered.

"Let's sit over there." She led the way to two chairs side by side.

A fat tourist lady near by stared at her with all the cow-eyed envy tubby dames have for the supple Parisienne who dresses as if clothes bloomed on her.

"You don't look happy, Cluckee."

"I am happy enough," she said lightly, tapping his arm. The taps referred to the note he had palmed.

They talked of trifles for a while, then Everhard mentioned a book he wanted her to read, and went to his room.

He closed the door, stood still, and read:

I am suspected. Why, I don't know. They have suddenly stopped letting me learn about anything and have put microphones all through my apartment. I can't be sure whether or not they suspect you, too. I was told that you had just arrived here and to come at once. It is because they want to watch us and overhear. I am writing this in the taxi. I can't imagine how you got out of K's murder, but the papers tell me you did. How my father must love you!



"But who wants to kiss Father?" Everhard inquired of himself.

And you must hurry and do something to make them satisfied. Need I remind you that both our lives depend on this being destroyed?

At that, Everhard crumpled the note and walked through the bedroom to the bath. The bathroom door was not quite shut. Somebody was in there. Everhard peered around the edge of the door.

A fellow in the blue shirt and trousers of the porter's staff was on his knees, wiping the clean tile with a clean towel. He grinned humbly and murmured, "Monsieur." A little canvas bag was by his side.

"Please, just a minute," said Everhard and gestured.

"Yes, monsieur."

The fellow dropped the clean towel over the canvas bag, picked it up and backed out, servilely, peering hard to see if Everhard was suspicious; but he had no way of guessing that Everhard knew porters didn't char in guests' bathrooms.

Everhard closed the door and flushed the note down the toilet.

When he came out the fellow was standing there, patient and incurious, with the canvas bag covered in an accidental sort of way by the towel. Everhard held out a couple of francs. As the fellow's fingers touched them, one fell to the floor. "Sorry," said Everhard and pointed to the coin. The fellow couldn't ignore it, and so stooped, and Everhard saw why he was trying so carefully not to turn his back. An electrician's brace and long slender bit, too long to be put into the little canvas bag, were stuck into the fellow's hip pocket.

Everhard pretended to have noticed nothing, took up a novel he had packed to read himself to sleep, and went to the elevator. He knew very well that, if given half a chance, the electrician's pride in his own cleverness

would keep him cock-sure; and Everhard thought that on the whole he would rather like having a microphone in his room—just as he liked playing with marked cards when the other fellow didn't suspect that he, Everhard, could read them too.

## 5

Vilette took him into the tea-room and though there were vacant tables, she insisted on sitting down at the table with two other people.

"It will show that we have nothing to talk of, secretly."

She poured tea, and, with the sugar-tongs above his cup, asked, "How many?"

"None," he said. She lifted the cup, offering it, and with no change in tone, as if it were quite a tea-table topic, inquired, "If I lose in the game, will you go on?" And by losing, she meant being tortured into telling things, then put to death.

He said, "You think of the nicest things to talk about!"

She, knowing that spectators watched, laughed a little, nodded. "The show must go on, you know."

"I'll probably do whatever I'm told. And, by the way, I haven't seen him lately, your father."

She raised her napkin to laughing lips and peered over it, as if half veiled. "Oh, but indeed you have!"

"Honest?"

"Honest."

"Hmm."

The two women who had been at the table when they sat down arose, and a man and woman at once took their places. Vilette's small foot dropped on Everhard's toe warningly. The next instant she began to speak sweetly of how very much she needed money.

The Hotel Xerich inclosed an arcade lined with small exclusive shops. After tea they strolled along, looking into windows. Vilette led Everhard into a glove shop that was



empty except for a highly colored saleslady with dripping earrings and a Spanish effect of hair.

Two minutes later in came a little prim, spruce man who explained that he was in no hurry, but wished to make a selection for his wife. He sat down.

Everhard moved his foot out of the way as Vilette's toe reached for it. She, with no hurry at all, tried on gloves, examined only the most costly, and concluded by ordering two dozen pairs. The Spanish-looking saleslady almost embraced her; but the Spanish-looking person's admiration soared skyward when Vilette, opening her purse, shook her head, and asked Everhard if he would mind lending her the money. Nice shopping technique. The prim, spruce little man would have something to tell.

In the arcade Vilette murmured teasingly: "I have let you down easily. As a usual thing, I take my admirers into a jewelry store." Then quickly, "No matter what may happen to me, they must not suspect you!"

They strolled about; and at the first good chance he asked: "Listen, Cluckee. If I can get Hovenden in a hole, will it be all right with . . . you know?"

"If it's cleverly done!" she said in a flash.

6

Everhard went to his rooms and looked into the bathroom to see if anybody else, surprised by his return, had withdrawn there to hide. He also looked, without much interest, to see if any particles of plaster would disclose the position of the microphone, and found none. Then he winked at the wall, took the telephone-book, and called up a business house that did a lot of exporting.

A woman fussed excitedly when he began to talk, but lapsed into disgruntled listening as he said sternly:

"Please listen and do as I tell you. Even if you don't understand, other people will. Tell Kiro to notify the party at Washington that our soap is on the way. Tell

Kiro to tell him that if he goes to sleep on the job again and lets the stuff be grabbed by the Customs, he'll have to pay it out of his own private account. Tell Kiro to get me some money, quick. I don't care how he gets it. I can't wait for the soap to be sold. That's all."

He hung up while the distracted woman was imploring him to believe that she did not know Monsieur Kiro; which wasn't odd, in view of the fact that Everhard had never heard of the gentleman, either.

Everhard paced the room a while to sound nervous, then called the Horse Shoe Club and left word for Nick Dodalus to telephone him.

An hour later Dodalus rang up, eager and sympathetic. He had tried all day to reach Everhard at the apartment, but was told there was no such number.

"You must've got it down wrong," said Everhard.

Dodalus wanted to talk of Kurlingen's death; but Everhard said, "Nick, I'm in a hole and need money, quick."

Nick's voice stiffened at that, quite as if unexpectedly poked with a pin. "How much you want?"

"More than you think."

"How much?"

"A million francs."

The business man under the Greek's skin grunted. A million francs meant \$40,000 and that is a lot of money—in business. Dodalus often tossed that much into a poker pot just to see if anybody had the nerve to call him. That was sport.

"Come down to the club and we'll talk it over," he said in a business man's voice, non-committal and shrewd.

"Can't. Have to stay in my room for a call."

Everhard hung up, satisfied that the microphonic listener would understand that he was in pressing need of money.

He was dressing for dinner when there was a heavy knock on the door. "Come in," he called.



Nick Dodalus came waddling in with a fresh unlighted cigar in his bediamonded fingers. "'Lo!" he said and tossed his hat at the table. He had match and match-box in his hands, but before lighting his cigar he reached into an inside pocket and dropped a pad of fresh crisp bank-notes on the table, pointed at them with unlighted cigar, and smiled from under drowsy lids. "There you are." Then he struck the match.

"Nick, how the hell did you ever get rich!"

Dodalus grinned. "'Cause when I'm being a sucker, I know it. In business I ain't no sucker." Thick lips drew on the cigar.

"And now?"

The Greek took the cigar out of his mouth and eyed the tip as critically as if it were a jewel he was thinking of buying; then shook his head as if dissatisfied with its ruby-value.

"No," he said, looking up. "Not this time. I know damn little about you, Mr. Richmond, but I know this much. If you'd said, 'Nick, how about a little poker?' I'd play. And if you was the sort that couldn't be trusted, you'd have got the money. I ain't made mine among Jews, Arabs, Turks, without knowing when a fellow can be trusted."

"But you'd have staked Kurlingen."

"That was different. I was way into him. Wouldn't-a hurt much for me to give 'im a little back. Wish I had now, poor devil."

"And you're not even going to ask me what I want it for?"

"Hell—no!"

"I'll tell you anyhow. A friend of mine is up against it for cash. She's perfectly all right, but you know how shopkeepers are!"

"That de Nevers?" Dodalus growled.

"She's all right, Nick. I know women and—"

"You do like hell! She's bad. I've already told you.

No shopkeeper'll ever get a look at that. An' you'll never get a centime back. She's cold and hard as ice."

"And lovely as a dream, Nick."

The other grunted, disgusted. "She'll bleed you to death."

"Listen, Nick. One of your ancestors, a fellow named Homer, wrote about some sirens that lured men and killed 'em. So how the hell do careful boys, like you, who stuff their ears with cotton, know but what death is a measly price to pay for the ecstasy of being killed by such lovely creatures?"

"Ow!" Dodalus groaned and grumbled fretful curses. Everhard offered the money back, but the Greek waved the cigar in dismissal. "Go ahead. Take it. I do as I damn please and don't want fellows preachin'. Now tell me about poor old Kurlingen."

When he was leaving he said, "I'm going to Cairo. Business. But I'll give myself a little birthday party for a send-off. You'll come?"

"If I have to crawl. And pay this back. When is the party?"

A fat bediamonded hand moved indifferently toward the notes. "Pay it into Barclay's. To my account. Any time. Party'll be in about a week. Don't know just yet."

"How old, Nick?"

Dodalus swore, amused. "Don't know. Not when I was born or where. But if I want to celebrate, I say, 'Maybe it really is my birthday.' And who the hell knows but maybe it is?"

7

Everhard eyed the money. He turned it over, pitched it aside, and picked it up again, broodingly. Then he said, "I'll take a chance."

He called the hotel office and asked for a messenger that could be trusted. He was offered a page, a porter, a clerk; but turned thumbs down, explaining that the



package he wanted delivered was valuable. A house detective then came to the room, and took the package containing one million francs. His instructions were to take it to Mademoiselle Jeanne Colbert, deliver it in person, and get a receipt.

"That ought to put it over that she's working her vamp racket hard," said Everhard to himself. "But anybody who thinks I'd give up forty thousand dollars to any woman is crazy. The Death's-Headers themselves have got to pay me back—or, rather, Dodalus. That is, unless little Fifi forgot her promise. We'll soon see." He added, "I ought to've found out first."

He dressed for dinner, went to a booth phone, and called the number at which Fifi Guyot had promised to leave the address of her new apartment.

"Fourteen, Place Cercle, monsieur," said a sweet understanding voice.

## Chapter Sixteen

### 1

EVERHARD went at once to No. 14 Place Cercle. The old concierge said Mademoiselle Guyot was in, and had such a wise look in his eyes that Everhard was at once confirmed in his suspicion as to who was paying for the apartment and dug into his pocket.

Fifi was almost ready to go out to dinner, she said; but looked rather as if she meant to go to a ball after the dinner. She did not have quite the true Parisienne's restraint when it came to making herself look attractive; but she did have charm of a certain kind—as strong and noticeable as her perfume.

Fifi threw herself at Everhard quite as if she loved him. Her honied luring voice said she had been afraid he would forget her.

"No chance. Besides, we need the money. Stage set?"

"I have the most charming little apartment. So discreet!" She took his hand, leading him about the rooms.

"And you do *really* love me, don't you, dear?"

"You'll think so if you try any tricks on me!"

Fifi laughed with a sort of ecstatic nervousness, as if she liked being afraid.

"Has any one been near you, with questions about the Kurlingen affair?"

"No, monsieur." She shook her curly head and stared as innocently as if telling the truth. "Not yet."

"And what did you tell them—over the telephone?"

"Oh?"

"Umm-hmm."

"Oh, exactly what you told me I was to say, monsieur!"



In a hasty frightened whisper: "I do not dare deceive you, for then you would say that I had told you of . . ." her tone trailed until it was almost inaudible . . . "the Death's Head!"

"True, darling. One peep, and I'll throw you overboard. So you said Kurlingen had not died at once, but drew his gun and fired through the window?"

"Yes, and that when you ran in you saw the rope dangle across your window, and so guessed at once that Guyot had killed him."

"And that I, having had much trouble with the police in my own country and elsewhere, do not readily tell them things?"

Fifi nodded rapidly. "Yes, because when you had put away your own gun which Guyot had thrown into the window, you knew the police would have to think that it was suicide. And that is the truth, isn't it?"

"Near enough. You explained that I then waited for Guyot, caught him in priest's dress, that he tried to threaten me, so I slammed him into a closet . . . and talked with you?"

"Yes, dear. That *is* just what I said. And that you and I right away became such good friends. And because you did not want that wretched Guyot to annoy me any more, you wrote Monsieur Biradou just what had happened and—"

"Not quite, Fifi. I did not mention La Tête de Mort."

"Oh, I know that!" she said quickly, uneasily. The very name made her shudder. "But I do not understand why the police have done nothing about it."

Everhard looked mystified too; but he understood, or thought he did, why Biradou was as disappointed as any one that Kurlingen had seemed to commit suicide; and why Biradou wanted to protect Guyot or else quietly to punish him for having bungled. Fifi, of course, being a very small pawn in the game, would know nothing of Biradou's connection with La Tête de Mort.

"But the party on the telephone," Everhard suggested, "quite readily understood why you and I became friends almost at once?"

Fifi smiled brightly, nodding. She felt there could be no mystery as to why any man would love her.

"Are you afraid of big game, Fifi?"

"Oh, no no, not if you are with me!"

"I'll be on the job. And darling, if you don't go through with it, I'll break your neck—or make you wish I had. Go through with it, and I'll save your soul—what's left of it."

Fifi cooed warmly, with a cuddling huddle: "I would do anything for you! And have you found a nice man to be my friend?"

"Not yet. But I'll pick him out. To-night if I can."

"Where do I meet him—this nice man you are to find for me?"

"I'll spot him. Then telephone you where to go—and make eyes at him. Probably pick an American. Easily scared, Americans. I know, being one. Somebody with jewelry on him. And if you don't want to go through with it, now is the time to say no."

"Please, I say yes!"

"Understand, though, that if you weaken, you are all through—in every way."

"Do you think I am weak?" she asked coquettishly. "I will show you!"

Everhard took her to dinner, fed her well, was attentive and seemed charmed; but it amused him to think of the expression that would be on her pretty vain face when she learned that he had used her as a cat's-paw to get money to give to that notorious vampire, Isobel de Nevers.

Fifi did not want to go back to the apartment and wait, alone. But Everhard insisted. "You'll do as I tell you!" She did not like not having her own way, but she did rather like the feeling that he was her master. "If you sit around in a café," he explained, "you'll have a



lot of useless fellows trying to flirt with you. You stick right in the apartment till I telephone you where to go, and whom to smile at. Understand?"

"Yes, darling."

## 2

Everhard, being in need of a suitable messenger, thought he stood the best chance of finding whom he wanted among the art students. They are often reckless young scapegraces, usually in need of money, impudent and venturesome.

He went to a noisy little café near the Dôme, looked about, and went away. He visited three or four before he spotted a moody young man whose face he liked, and whose eyes had the downcast hopelessness that reflects empty pockets.

"May I sit here?" Everhard inquired.

"Certainly," said the young man, politely but with no graciousness.

They talked. Everhard bought drinks and cigarettes, studied the youth's face critically, then: "I am a stranger to this part of the city, and am rather in need of an artist."

"What kind of work, if you please?"

"Really rather more of an actor than a painter."

"Ha!" said the young man, suddenly a-bubble with good spirits. "I have proved myself a great actor. For three weeks I have made my landlady believe that the next day I would have money. And if you knew my landlady you would know that is a great achievement."

Everhard evasively explained that he wanted to get a certain message to a certain man, convincingly; and offered a fair sum as advance payment.

The youth dabbed out his cigarette. "And have we got time for me to eat? I vaguely remember that it used to be good fun—eating!"

He ate, joyously, and drank champagne.

Then they took a taxi and began scouting. It was about eleven o'clock. Hovenden was not at the Horse Shoe, but Everhard knew that it was too early for him to be at any of the night clubs Hovenden frequented. They changed taxis often so no one driver would have a chance to learn too much.

The youth, whose name was Charles—he was twenty-three—told Everhard the history of his life, his dreams of the future: dreams of rejoicing at the wretched humiliation of art committees who were to die miserably of chagrin because they had failed to recognize his early genius.

The streets, cafés, and gray-windowed studios of Paris have been made sacred by the misery of gaily brave art-martyrs—nobler than religious saints, since, seeking not the fabulous rewards of heaven, they want only a meager livelihood for honest earthly idealism. Half the folly of bohemia is but the yeasty working of courage and dreams, and becomes the bread on which future generations are fed and nourished. Young artists, poets, painters, novelists, and such, do not merely climb Golgotha; they abide on the gloomy hill, making a riotous clamor to hide their agony. "Leave them alone!" says Paris, the city of great understanding; and she looks on with meddlesomeless serenity; which is why her art-nurslings love her.

## 3

By repeatedly telephoning, Everhard learned when Hovenden arrived at the club.

Charles pulled his hat down firmly, buttoned his coat, shook hands with Everhard, nervously unbuttoned his coat, said, "You'll see!" and went into the club entrance.

He told the door-man in gray and gilt that he had an imperative message for Hovenden. He told the guardian of the inner portal the same, and was scrutinized with disfavor but told to wait. The guardian disappeared and returned alone, "The prince asks me to take the message, if you please."



"I was told to give it in person, privately, monsieur. I know nothing of what it really means, but was paid well to promise I would do as told. And my promise is sacred, monsieur. Always, monsieur."

The guardian grumbled and went away again. He returned and beckoned.

In the lounge Charles was taken to a tall man who stood waiting.

"Monsieur Hovenden?"

Hovenden, with aloof dignity and suspicion, nodded rigidly.

"Monsieur, not an hour ago, as I was passing along the street, a very fine automobile swung to the curb. A man called to me. When I stepped near, he said, 'You are Jean Tillier, are you not?' I said 'No, monsieur. I am François Vernon.' 'The devil!' he said, 'but how you resemble Tillier! I have no time to lose, and will you take a message as I tell you?' He thrust out all this money, monsieur." Charles showed a fistful of franc notes. "Then he took off his glove and drew a ring from his pocket, and showed it to me. A curious ring, with a skull's face. He flipped up the face so that I could see—"

"Yes, quickly! What else?" said Hovenden, impatiently interested.

"Yes, monsieur. He said that I should first tell you of the ring. Then he said I was to tell you that the previous messenger was struck in the street by an automobile and taken to the hospital. That is why the message has been delayed. He said he had mistaken me for a man known to him, but for this one time I would do as well as another if I repeated everything precisely as told."

"The message, you stupid!" said Hovenden, growing nervous.

"Yes, monsieur. I was to come here and say it to you in person and alone; he described you as tall, very handsome, with keen eyes and the look of a man who understood quickly. He made me repeat the message three

times to make sure I had it perfectly. It is this: 'The man Richmond has taken up with Madame Guyot, who is well known to us. He has also just made a very expensive present to a certain woman who is well known to you, monsieur. Madame Guyot's new apartment is at Number fourteen, Place Cercle, second floor, front, where she is now alone. Some one' (he said *you* would understand at once who is meant by 'some one') 'has instructed you to go at once and question the Guyot woman so that we may learn more particularly why the affair with the man K. was unsuccessful.' . . . That is all, monsieur."

"Here," said Hovenden, "is a little something to help you forget that you have ever spoken with me."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Charles.

He left the club at once, came to where Everhard waited at the corner, quickly told how things had gone; then went his way happily with enough in his pocket to appease the landlady for months to come.

## 4

Everhard had looked about until he found Hovenden's limousine; and, watching from across the street, saw Hovenden come, speak to the chauffeur who held the door open, and drive away.

Three minutes later Everhard found a taxi and followed, getting out a block away from Fifi Guyot's address. He looked, but did not see Hovenden's car, and rather wondered if there had been a slip-up.

But the look the concierge, blowzy with sleep, gave Everhard made him quite well understand that another gentleman had just gone up the stairs. The concierge gazed at the stairs unhappily, then shrugged his shoulders.

Everhard mounted the two flights rapidly, rose to his tiptoes in the hall, hurried forward, and bent an ear to the apartment door. He heard Fifi's low excited voice,



but not what she said. It would not do to leave her alone very long with Hovenden.

Everhard withdrew some twenty feet, walked briskly to the door, and knocked lightly. It was only because he listened intently that he heard a slight muffled flutter of hasty movement. He knocked again, impatiently. No answer. Then, like one who has rights, he tried the door, shaking it. No answer. He put a finger on the bell and kept it there. And waited some two or three minutes.

"W—who's there?" Fifi called, trying to sound timid. She sounded more than timid—scared.

"Whom else did you expect, angel-face?"

"Oh, then it is you!"

"One wouldn't think you thought so from the time you are taking."

She opened the door, giving him a quick searching look and saying rapidly: "I have been asleep. I looked a fright, and couldn't let you see me like that." She now had a lacy robe over a gossamer nightgown.

"No luck to-night, Fifi. That's why I didn't phone. I came. Thought we could be together a little while." He sauntered about, quite at home.

"I have such a headache!" She was holding the door open, hopeful that he would go. "After it got so late, I went to bed. If you'd only telephoned, I would have told you I couldn't see you to-night. I'll be all right in the morning. You'll come back then, won't you, dear?" She pulled the door even wider.

"Anything you say, Princess Charming." He ignored the door. Near the table he glanced into the ash-tray. "Have you taken aspirin?" Everhard sat down.

Fifi Guyot sighed and pressed her head. She thoughtfully closed the door. Her hair—notwithstanding the time she pretended to have spent in making herself presentable—was tousled. "Such a headache!" She picked up a package of cigarettes, scratched a match, threw the box at the table.

"Ought you to smoke, with a headache?" He got up and went to her. "Poor child." He ran his hand down along her arm, held her fingers. "Why, you are sick! Trembling. Fingers are cold. This won't do. Come, let me tuck you in and say good night."

Fifi squirmed from him and hurried to the door, opening it. "No no! I'll be all right; please go!"

"Shut that door," he said, not gently, not angrily, but quite as if he meant to have his own way in this house. She was afraid of him, and closed the door quietly.

He took her by the hand and led her into the bedroom. Her pretty dress, hastily flung, lay where it had fallen near a chair.

"Why don't you put things away?" he asked rebukingly. Silken underthings were scattered. He pointed. "They cost money," he said with proprietary thrift.

"You haven't paid for any of them yet!" she answered with a flip of indignation.

"No?" He raised his voice. "Who's paying for this apartment? Answer me!"

"Oh, you, dear, of course. Don't be angry."

The bed-covering was flung back, the pillows rumpled, the creases not pressed down. Everhard ran his hand along the cold sheet. She watched staringly.

"Just smoothing the wrinkles, darling." He patted her shoulder, reassuring. "Poor child. I'll hang up your dress for you in the—"

"No *no*!"

He took his hand from the dress and looked at her.

"I mean—" she tried to smile—"I'll do it. I'll do it."

He turned and eyed the closet door. She saw where he looked, how he looked, and threw both arms at his neck. "I do love you so!"

He pulled the arms away, held the wrists firmly, set her writhing on the bed. "Stay there!" he said.

She jumped up, clutching at him, "Please!" Confession seemed struggling to get out of her mouth. But she,



too fearful to tell the truth, suddenly smiled luringly, whispered, "Please, I love you!"

"Sit down!" His voice was quiet, but the look in his eyes was as if he had struck her.

She sat down helplessly, with fright in her eyes and her lips twisted, whimpering without sound.

Everhard opened the closet door. He could see nothing. The closet was black. He reached up, turning on the light. Hovenden stood huddled half hidden among the dresses on hangers.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Everhard, not angrily, but not pleasantly.

Fifi Guyot groaned and rocked back and forth as if with cramps.

"This is not as you think, monsieur!" said Hovenden, indignant and attempting dignity; also he seemed somehow to be trying to convey a warning, but rather uncertainly.

Everhard laughed at him. "Well, come out, Hovenden. Make your apologies where it is a bit cooler. And let us talk things over like men of the world. I, who so well know Mademoiselle Fifi's charms, cannot reproach you for having succumbed to them. And since all women are faithless—if they have the chance—I cannot reproach her for yielding to your superior attractiveness. Come out of there."

Hovenden came, angered, humiliated, sullen.

"Since you say it is not as I think, then what the hell is it?" Everhard's manner was not encouraging.

Hovenden looked warningly at Fifi Guyot, as if commanding her to tell nothing of why he had come; then, trying to assume some hauteur, but being nervous about it: "I demand to be permitted to leave without being questioned. If you do not allow me to do so, then beware, Monsieur Richmond!"

"You talk that way to me, Hovenden, and you'll leave on a shutter, under a sheet!"

Hovenden's eyes popped under the flint-struck look Everhard gave him, and Fifi Guyot made a slight sound with dry mouth, then rubbed at her mouth with the back of her hand.

Hovenden pulled nervously at a handkerchief. His dark hazy eyes were troubled, and in trying to look menacing he merely showed fear. Sweat water-marked his cosmetic gloss of skin. He drew himself up with a lordly air. His tongue sounded thick, and for all of the hauteur of the words, his tone indicated that he really didn't hope to be convincing. "I must ask you to believe what I say. It is not as you think. I will not explain—"

"Will not?" Everhard inquired, interested.

"Cannot," Hovenden corrected readily, "cannot explain beyond saying that I had a matter of importance to take up with this woman. So now I bid you good night."

"No, Hovenden, you are not bidding me good night—yet. In a way, I'm not blaming you. But for you, I might have gone on thinking that lovely creature could be trusted. However, I need a million francs. Can you let me have it?"

"I shall send them to you to-morrow."

"But what security do you give me, now?"

"My word, monsieur."

"Not so good."

Fifi Guyot wanted to scream warningly. The idea of using extortion on any one connected with La Tête de Mort terrified her. She begged wildly: "No no no, it *is* not as you think! Please do not ask for money from *him*! Ah, please—"

"You keep quiet, or you'll go into that closet," said Everhard; and she wadded lace and silk with both fists against her mouth and stared beseechingly at Hovenden.

He did not look at her; but demanded of Everhard, "You will not take my word?"

"No."



"After you know who I am? When I have introduced you to my club . . . to my friends?"

"And found you in the bedroom of my Fifi?"

"But I have told you it is not as you think!" Hovenden shouted.

"But until you tell me what I should think, I shall think as I damn please."

"The secret is not mine," said Hovenden, with a virtuous air.

"All right. Take off your jewelry and empty your pockets. On the bed here. . . . To one side, Fifi!"

Fifi Guyot drunkenly got off the bed and dropped into a chair, huddling over. She shivered.

Hovenden threw back his shoulders. "I will submit to no such indignity!"

"A French jury would call it justifiable homicide," Everhard murmured. "Very sympathetic, French juries. When the woman is beautiful. Fifi is that. Aren't you, Fifi?"

"The devil take you!" she moaned.

"This is robbery, then?" Hovenden demanded.

"No, not at all. Extortion," Everhard explained composedly.

"I believe you knew I was here, all the time!" Hovenden had the glimmer of an idea.

"I knew damn well somebody was here. I heard voices before I knocked. I smelt a peculiar perfume—peculiarly disagreeable. I saw a gold-tipped cigarette mashed in the tray. Fifi hurried to get me out of the door—with her headache. And as I happen to be paying for this apartment, I naturally am interested in who visits it. Empty your pockets!"

Hovenden's handsome face had a tortured look. Reluctantly he took a wallet from his pocket and threw it on the bed. "There," he said sullenly.

"You forget, my friend," Everhard suggested softly,

"that if you are pitched out of the window and picked up with a broken neck, every one will think you jumped. But of course, if I break your neck, I shan't get my million francs. And if I don't get some worth-while pledge off you, I shan't get them, either. Turn your pockets inside out. Every one of them."

"You will regret this! You will regret this!" said Hovenden, but drew out his watch. His fingers shook as he unsnapped the chain. He tossed the watch to the bed. A penknife and handkerchiefs followed. "My key-purse," he said, opening the small leather case to show that it contained keys, and returned it to his pocket.

"I said *everything!*"

"But my keys!" He tossed the keys to the bed. Then his cigarette-case, and a gold lighter. He threw the coin-purse. He took off his rings. "There!" His eyes blazed.

"Start taking off your clothes."

"M-my clothes!"

"Since you won't empty your pockets, I'll go through them after you are gone. Dress shirts have long tails. That'll keep your legs warm."

Hovenden drew back. Curses choked him. His name, social position, wealth, and his studied dignity, had kept him from nearly every sort of affront; but he had the uneasy feeling that this man would actually strip him of his trousers and send him into the chill night with shirt tail flapping. He disconsolately again poked fingers into his pocket, and tried to hold something concealingly in his fingers.

Everhard tapped the hand. "Open up!" Their eyes met. Hovenden's burning with baffled rage, murderous and helpless. Everhard's narrowed, with little dangles of fire near the pupils. The tightly closed fingers opened slowly. A platinum ring, fashioned into a skull and cross-bones, lay there.

Fifi Guyot bit her lips to keep from shrieking.

Everhard examined the ring inquiringly. "Kurlingen



had one like this. I still have it. What does it mean, hmm? Secret order or something?" His thumb pressed against the skull's chin. Everhard studied the portrait, then studied Hovenden's face. "Looks just like you—or as you will look to God on Judgment Morn!" He threw the ring on to the bed. Then he reached quickly to Hovenden's vest pocket, drew out the watch charm. "You've overlooked this." It too was thrown on the bed.

"Now," said Everhard, "send the money to my hotel to-morrow morning. Not before eleven, not after twelve. If it isn't sent, I'll tell the story to the newspapers, and show this stuff—" he waved his hand at the bed—"to prove it. When I get the money, you get this back. . . . Now tell little Fifi good-by. She's dreadfully upset."

Fifi jumped up and ran across the room. Her fingers moved writhingly in her thick curly hair. "I wish both of you were in hell!" she screamed.

"Oh, one word more, Hovenden, just to give you something to think about. Why the hell do you call yourself a prince of the House of El Kasyd?"

Hovenden, kicked in the belly, couldn't have looked more amazed and hurt. He tried to glower, but trembled. His mouth opened soundlessly. He swung himself about and strode from the room with neck out-thrust and the leather pads of his shoulders sticking up lumpishly. He banged the hallway door as if to jar down the wall. Hat, stick, and overcoat were left in Fifi's closet.

## 5

Fifi came at Everhard with lips drawn back and hands clenched. Oaths boiled in her mouth. Venomous French oaths. Claw-shaped fingers hovered near his face. His look held them back.

Hysterical, she screamed: "You fool! Why didn't you go when I wanted you to? He is one who wears the ring of La Tête de Mort!"

"I don't care if he wears old La Tête's pajamas," said Everhard indifferently, and sat down on the bed, fingering the loot, appraisingly. He examined the curious watch charm. It was quite heavy, slightly larger than a franc, and seemed inartistically and uselessly thick. He found the two halves unscrewed.

"I believe you watched and followed him here!" said Fifi, menacingly.

"And to save your own neck, you'll say that, eh? Try it. Fifi, you can't lie well enough to make him believe you were not in on the game. Hustled him into the closet. Tore off your clothes and pretended just to have got out of bed—with a headache. I'll tell him you didn't do it to persuade me to go away. I'll say you did it to make it look that much worse for him. And he knows you are a badger, Fifi. So, lovely creature, you are in the devil of a mess. Ho-ho! See what I've found!"

The unscrewed watch charm disclosed the seal of La Tête de Mort. He held it out to her, holding firmly. Her two hands closed on his wrist as she bent, peering. Her hands dropped as if from poison. She swayed back and spoke with awe.

"He is one of the highest! Nothing can save us! Oh, you stupid beast of a fool!"

"One of the highest, hm? I don't believe it. Not that chump-head. But pack up, Fifi. If I leave you alone, they may do things to you."

"Oh," she cried tragically, "it is no use! He had just told me that Guyot is dead in prison. And—"

"That's what you get for failing, hm? But come on, Fifi. Get into a dress."

"Where can I go? I must register, and they will learn from the police. I have no friends who will take me in and not tell where I am hid. Ah, monsieur, you do not know La Tête de Mort! There is no escape! It is death!"

She fell into a chair with her head bowed to her knees



and tore the filmy silk, clenching and jerking as she sobbed.

Everhard eyed her, an abject wreck of a woman, and thought of another woman; a girl not so old as Fifi, who also felt the shadow of the sword above her head; who knew that it might fall at any hour, yet carried on without the quiver of an eyelid; who that very day, in the disguised tone of social trivialities, had, as she poured tea, pledged him to go on with the fight if she went down. He wasn't contemptuous of Fifi. She couldn't help it. He was admiring of Vilette, who carried the grace of courage with head up and smiling mouth. The gods had bestowed beauty upon both; had given courage to one but withheld it from the other. Everhard found himself wondering why; then snapped his fingers, awakening himself, arousing Fifi.

"Come on, Fifi. I'll have you hid in an hour. Neither police nor Death's-Headers will ever find you. Not if you behave yourself."

"Where, monsieur? Oh where?"

"I don't know . . . yet." He began putting Hoven-den's things into his pocket. "If you don't make plans, nobody can ever find out what you're up to. But go where I send you, do what I say . . . and you'll live to have a gay time fooling lots smarter men than I am."

"Oh monsieur!" Hope leaped glowingly into her face. "You do mean it? Please, you are not angry with me? Ah, I—"

"I am never angry, Fifi. Just distrustful. But as far as you're concerned, it's the same thing. I'm leaving in ten minutes. Will take you along if you're ready."

6

They slipped down the stairs. Everhard put Fifi and her suitcase near the street entrance where she would

not be seen, then called to the concierge: "The door, if you please." When the electric latch slipped and the door unlocked, Everhard went to it with heavy stride, pushed Fifi noiselessly through, pulled the door to, took her suitcase, and began to look for a taxi.

It was almost 2 A.M. He changed taxis twice, the better to break his trail if inquiries were made. On the Rue Raspail he got out alone, leaving the taxi to follow slowly at a little distance.

A woman, alone, presently glided through the shadows of the street lights, eyed him, saw that he eyed her, and so stopped. "Monsieur is lonely?"

"No, scared, mademoiselle."

"Ah, no no no, monsieur!"

"Listen, pretty child. In that taxi is a friend of mine. A woman. Her wicked husband will turn this town upside down to find her. She must have a place a stay for a few days until I can arrange to take care of her. If she goes with you, she won't have to register. And with what I pay, you won't have to work. Will you take her?"

"Oh, yes indeed, monsieur! I too once had a horrid husband—"

"Bad things, husbands. I don't intend ever to be one. They never please. Come. I shall introduce you. And your address? Thanks. Be gentle with her. And when you quarrel, as you two surely will in a week, don't scratch her face. That belongs to me. Pull her hair and pinch her arms, but let her face alone. It's all she has."

## 7

The next morning promptly at eleven o'clock a certain Monsieur Balzar was shown into Everhard's room at the Hotel Xerich.

He was a little old fellow with a bald head, a vulture's wrinkled neck, hollow eyes, and thin hooked nose. His yellowish skin was bleached; it was as if he, born of a



sun-colored race, had lived long in shadows. Monsieur Balzar spoke French perfectly, but looked very foreign. Everhard did not even try to guess at his nationality. Monsieur Balzar had yellowish cat-like eyes. You felt that he could see in the dark. His clothes were good, well tailored, but he didn't seem used to them.

He and Everhard eyed each other appraisingly, and Monsieur Balzar's thin lips curled over shrunken gums in enigmatic smiles; and Everhard thought, "I've never seen a crueller face."

"Monsieur," said Balzar, in a curiously thin, irritating voice, "I have come about the matter you and Monsieur Hovenden discussed last night."

"Sit down, monsieur. I am glad he sent a gentleman instead of coming in person."

Balzar sat down, but somehow as if unused to chairs. Everhard had a notion that this man would be more comfortable if he squatted cross-legged on the floor.

"Monsieur, permit me to inquire as to the reason for your dislike of my friend."

"If he is worthy of your friendship, Monsieur Balzar, then he has told you that I found him in the bedroom closet of a friend of mine shortly after midnight."

"Let us be frank, monsieur, if you please. How did you know he was there? My friend has the feeling that his discovery was prearranged."

"No, he doesn't have that feeling at all. I shall tell you, Monsieur Balzar, the feeling that he does have. He thinks so highly of himself that he can't imagine himself being a fool—without the connivance of other people. For certain reasons that we need not enter into, unless you have much leisure, I found a certain lady charming. I was paying for her apartment. Last night I called, unexpectedly."

"'Unexpectedly,'" said Monsieur Balzar, with slight reproach. "Ah, most indiscreet of one who wishes to preserve his illusions about charming women, monsieur."

"True. But were even you at my age wise, monsieur? As I paused at the door, I heard voices within. I knocked. There was a muffled scurrying. After much delay, I was admitted. I found the lady pretending she had been in bed with a headache. She suggested that I go away and return in the morning. Do I look so stupid, Monsieur Balzar? I found one gold-tipped cigarette on the tray. She uses plain American. I made certain investigations. And, monsieur, I beg of you to imagine my feeling when the gentleman I found in the closet turned out to be Monsieur Hovenden, whose life I so recently had the honor of saving! He was really not at his best; not at all. He tried to tell me matters were not as they appeared. A statement, monsieur, that had nothing but effrontery to recommend it. And I inquire of you again, my dear Monsieur Balzar, do I look so stupid? I happened just at that moment to recall that I was in pressing need of money. He at once promised aid, and after some slight discussion left me with certain pledges to indicate that he would not forget. I take it from your presence, monsieur, that punctuality is one of Monsieur Hovenden's many virtues."

Balzar smiled—whether in amusement or with pleasure at the thought of seeing you squirm, tortured, it was hard to tell. He coolly suggested. "Can you not see how very much the whole thing smells of a trap in which my friend was unwisely caught? The lady, I believe, is known to have used herself as bait for such traps."

"I see what you mean. But all I can say is that if the lady lured him, she certainly did not admit me to her confidence. I merely took advantage of an opportunity."

"Where is she now, if you please, monsieur?" Balzar inquired smoothly.

"The devil knows. I gave her a beating she won't forget soon—"

"Ah!" Balzar's yellowish eyes brightened like up-turned wicks: it was as if he liked to hear of such things.



"—and left at once. She too seemed to think that if she lied long enough I would believe her."

"You are a very clever man, monsieur," said Balzar, slowly, and rubbed at his thin nose with a delicate forefinger, eying Everhard suspiciously. "But there is one thing more I would like permission to ask about."

"At your service, monsieur."

Then Monsieur Balzar arose, looked at the wall, walked directly to a framed print, lifted it, and with wrench of hand pulled loose the microphonic ear.

"I'll be damned!" said Everhard. "How did you know that thing was there? I didn't."

"I imagine, monsieur, you are unaware of many things which really concern you quite intimately. But one question, please, that I do not care to have any one overhear." Balzar returned calmly to his chair, seated himself, looked searchingly at Everhard, and inquired in a sinister slithering tone, "Just why, please, did you choose to infer that the noble Prince Hovenden is not a member of the royal family of El Kasyd?"

Everhard smiled. "That got under his hide, hm? No particular reason except to make him unhappy. I know nothing of his heredity. Care nothing." His tone became serious: "Yet I do know this. Once as a child I was lifted above the heads of the crowd as old Prince Fered drove through the street. I have never forgotten the unconscious dignity, the piercing glance, the serene arrogance of the old graybearded prince. An unsheathed sword of a man! Cruel as hell, but—by God!—made of iron! For one thing, old Prince Fered would never have sneaked into a lady's bedroom closet to avoid any man—except perhaps to shoot me dead the instant I opened the door. And if I had suggested to him that I needed money, he would have told me to go to the devil, and walked out, unhurriedly. I can't explain any better than that. All I really meant was that Hovenden, with his shoulder pads and actor's pose, looks and acts as if bastard blood ran

in his veins. There you have it. All of it. What about it?"

Silence. Monsieur Balzar's yellow eyes peered unwinkingly. Everhard's met them as unwinkingly. Balzar's were the first to flicker and shift.

He rubbed the other side of his thin nose, and inquired, "Are you as critical of all men?"

"Do you play poker, Monsieur Balzar?"

"No, monsieur."

"It is a game in which cards are used. But you win or lose according to how well you know the look on men's faces. I play it well, monsieur."

"I believe you." Balzar nodded. He appeared really convinced. Then slowly, dangerously: "Monsieur, do you not understand that the rings of which you seem inclined to make a collection are the insignia of a powerful secret order? One it is not wise to offend? One that offers much security and many rewards to its members?"

"Is that so! You know, Mademoiselle Guyot must have known that. She went into hysterical capers over that ring, but I couldn't get anything out of her. We have secret orders in America, too. There are Mooses and Owls and Elks and Woodmen, the Klu-Klux Klan, and of course the Masons. I've never been interested. I can't get enthusiastic over the idea of allowing people I don't know to call me 'brother' just because we wear the same kind of jewelry."

"The order to which I refer," Balzar said quietly, "is somewhat different." He cocked his shell-like bald head to one side, gazed at Everhard, nodded just a little, murmured, "'An unsheathed sword of a man.'" Reflected, then asked, "That was the only time you ever saw Prince Fered?"

"The only time."

"You judge men well, monsieur." Balzar nodded, straightened, hesitated, then: "Monsieur Richmond, I shall be frank. I came here to-day with very inimical feeling toward you. I am not yet quite sure what to think



of you. But I do think that Prince Hovenden is a bad judge of character, himself."

"Oh, but monsieur, let us be fair. Hovenden was too irritated to be impartial."

"Not merely last night. Before. From the first meeting. After you so miraculously saved his life from the mad chauffeur. I comprehend the reason now, fully. You were not wholly impressed by Prince Henri de Rougemont Hovenden El Kasyd. And he felt it."

"Well, Monsieur Balzar, you have guessed it. I tried to be pleasant and all that—until last night."

"But I must assure you that last night he did visit your friend for another reason than that you naturally insist upon believing."

"He chose a bad time," said Everhard.

"Yes," Balzar admitted. He paused, watching closely. "And he chose that time for reasons that we find difficult to understand."

Everhard played poker, saying nothing. Balzar scrutinized his face, then: "She is a minor member of the same secret order. You, monsieur, are perhaps not interested in becoming more familiar with the order?"

Everhard said at once: "Not if Hovenden's one of the heads of it. I should say not! I'd be out of luck."

"But perhaps," Balzar suggested encouragingly, as if trying to see how much eagerness Everhard would show, "matters can be arranged to your satisfaction?"

"I doubt it. Still, friends are a nice thing to have in my business."

"And your business, monsieur?"

Everhard grinned. "Whatever pays well. Like accepting pledges from prosperous gentlemen, which they are to redeem!"

"How did you know the value of those pledges?" Balzar asked smoothly.

"All I knew of what they meant to him is that he tried to hide them. Naturally, what he tried to hide was just

what I wanted. I told him that if he didn't come through, I meant to take the story to the papers. I wanted some of his personal stuff to make the papers believe my story."

"And you will take it to the newspapers if he refuses?" Balzar inquired with sinister menace; and the next instant jumped as Everhard's fist struck the table.

"You are goddamned right I will!" exclaimed Everhard. Then, explaining: "I'll show him up. Give him plenty. Then the next time I find any gentleman in an embarrassing situation and ask him to lend me money, he won't welch on it."

"You are a very strange fellow, monsieur," said the scrawny Balzar, impressed but still doubtful. "Much more plain-spoken than I had supposed. And, I suspect, more clever. It is difficult to know what to think of you."

"I'll tell you one thing to think. If I don't have that money by twelve o'clock, your friend Hovenden'll have to buy all the newspapers in Paris to stop the story. They'll jump for it. And if you don't think I mean it, don't pay me."

Balzar, who admitted that he had never played poker, did not reply. But apparently he was convinced. He drew a sheaf of notes from his inside pocket and without a word laid them on the table.

"Thank you, monsieur," said Everhard, as politely as possible. Then examined the notes, suspecting counterfeit, and meticulously counted the money. Balzar watched him and moved his tight lips a little nervously.

Everhard got up, opened a drawer, took out a handkerchief knotted into a small bundle and laid it on the table. Balzar carefully sorted the trinkets.

"If you please," he said demanding, "the ring of Monsieur Kurlingen is not here?"

Everhard tapped a pocket. "It's here. Hovenden ransomed his own stuff. I didn't promise this."

"And your price on it?"

"That's hard to say." He drew out the ring, looked at



the portrait. "I found this. I'd like to keep it. It's a work of art. Whoever did the portrait is a genius."

Balzar stood up to leave. "Monsieur, you are strangely fortunate. Strangely clever too. One must wonder which attribute dominates. Perhaps you never really considered the matter, but I have, and know that some men are born lucky. . . . 'An unsheathed sword of a man.' Yes, Prince Fered was that. I knew him well. . . . And your admiration for the artist," he murmured. "Strange. Yet I am not quite sure. No, monsieur, not yet quite sure of you."

Everhard, with all the graciousness of early training in good manners, bowed him out at the door, spoke gently but with no humbleness. In Balzar's last lingering glance there was still a puzzled look that shadowed his yellowish cat-like eyes.

Everhard turned back into the room and sat quietly for several minutes so that no spying person in the hall, at the telephone switchboard, or in the lobby could say that he had shown the least interest in following the movements of Monsieur Balzar.

Then Everhard called the hotel office and made a big fuss over that microphone. The wiring was traced and found to have been fished through from the room directly overhead which had been occupied by a man and a woman who insisted upon having that particular room. They had arrived at the hotel but a few minutes after Everhard registered. They were gone. They had not checked out, but they never returned.

That afternoon Everhard moved back to the Île Saint Louis.

Madame Thurot almost embraced him and introduced a fat beaming young woman as her sister whom she had already put in as his housekeeper.

"She is really my sister, monsieur," she said earnestly.

"I knew that at a glance," said Everhard. "She has the same lovely eyes and charm of manner, madame!"

## Chapter Seventeen

### 1

MADAME THUROT's fat beaming sister brought tray and papers to Everhard's bedside. He tasted the coffee and told the expectant maid that it was very fine. When she went out, he arose stealthily and poured it into the toilet.

He propped himself upon the pillows and shook open "Le Matin." There was a story of a murder at the Hotel Xerich. He read that one Joseph Kerman, an American who had just arrived in Paris a few hours before, had been mysteriously murdered late yesterday afternoon. A woman was known to have called at Kerman's room. He was described as a large bony man. There were no personal papers, and the passport gave his occupation merely as that of an actor.

Everhard felt a little weak at his stomach and lay motionless, trying to think. Neither of J. K. James's first names was Joseph or Kerman; but Joseph Kerman was a name that he used when up to something that required extreme secrecy.

The other papers told the same story. None hinted at Joseph Kerman's being more than the passport indicated.

The telephone rang. "I'm not here!" Everhard called as he heard the bustling click-clack of the fat maid's feet. But when he heard her repeating the name of Dodalus as she took the message, he said, "I'll talk to him," and went to the telephone.

Dodalus, all eagerness, said that his birthday party would be in his apartment to-morrow night.

Everhard said, "I've got the money for you. If I don't



see you before, I'll surely drop in for a minute or two."

"That is your promise!" said Dodalus, clinchingly.

"Right, Nick. 'By."

## 2

Everhard dressed at once. He took a taxi to the Hotel Xerich, and there learned where the body of the American, Joseph Kerman, had been removed. He drove to the *entrepreneur de pompes funèbres*—which means undertaker. The more elaborate dramatic feeling of the French toward funerals is reflected in the extensive phrase.

Everhard passed through a dark recessed doorway and entered a sunless room where the shades of the dead seemed lingering invisibly.

He was at once met by a small bald man wearing a long-tailed coat. The man bowed sympathetically. The somber trappings of sorrow darkened the walls, and a peculiar stale smell was in the room.

The manner of the little bald man changed to uncertainty when he found what Everhard wanted. He said that the dead who had been brought to him for their last earthly care could not be exposed to the gaze of merely curious persons; but asked, "Were you a friend of Monsieur Kerman?"

"I once knew a man who did some acting under the name of Joseph Kerman. I'd like to see if this is the same person."

"Ah. And your name if you please, monsieur?"

"John Smith."

"Ah. If Monsieur Smith will be so kind as to sit here for a moment, just a wee little moment"; he measured off on his forefinger the length of the moment.

Everhard sat down. The little man went away. The wee little moment grew to an arm's length. Then the small bald man returned with a kind of muffled bustling. "Come, Monsieur Smith, if you please."

He led Everhard past a small gloomy chapel, along a dim hallway, and into a dark room where a covered coffin rested on velvet-draped trestles.

The room was more than merely gloomy. It was dark. Everhard stopped, not seeing his way clearly.

A heavy hand fell on Everhard's shoulder, and he spun away with cat-like quickness and backward lurch, his fingers shoulder-high under the double-breasted coat. A heavy voice laughed and James's burly body loomed against him.

"What's this?" Everhard snapped. "Rehearsal for the Follies?"

A dim globe dangling from a long wire was turned on. Two men with the look of French detectives about them stood against the wall, smiling a little; and the small bald man grinned with pop-eyed beaming.

"Matter, Don? Disappointed?" James grinned at him, reaching for his hand. "So you have got nerves, huh?"

"Not half as much nerve as you, to try a trick like that."

"I'm just a ghost now. Come along. Let's have a talk. I took a peek at you, John Smith, while you waited. And was damn glad to see you!"

He led Everhard into a little room littered with trimmings of artificial wreaths, and scraps of black cloth. A bundle of black-beaded crosses dangled from the wall. James sat on the lid of a chest and motioned toward the only chair.

"What you doing here?" Everhard asked.

"Playing dead."

"Who killed you?"

James took a cigarette from the package on chest, jarred the tobacco down, and groped about for a match: "Smartest girl in Paris."

Everhard thought for a moment. "To put her in solid with the skull and cross-bones?"

"You never boggle an I.Q. test, do you?"



"All right. Tell me things."

"I'm supposed to be down in Mexico, studying ruins or something. Got a vacation. Left Laura with the family in Los Angeles, ditched the bunch of scientists, hopped back across the continent and took a fast boat over. Thought I'd sort of sit in the gallery and look on. Didn't mean for you to know I was here. But I'm not half as smart as a man ought to be in my work."

"Very true," Everhard murmured solemnly.

"You'd make a great detective, Don. You can see things so clearly—when they're pointed out to you! But listen. Truth is I didn't know I was being watched or spotted. And be damned if I'd been at the hotel two hours before Yvette walked in on me and—"

"Who?"

"Yvette."

"So that's her name, hm?"

"Have I told something?"

"Tell the rest of it. Yvette-what?"

"Go to hell. She said they knew I was here. And on account of the Wattison case, they thought I'd come over to help hurt 'em."

"They work fast when you get into a hotel. I know, Jimmy."

"Well sir, Don," said James with deepening of voice, "they'd put it up to her flat that she was to walk in and kill me! No *ifs* about it. That was her job—or! You know the answer."

"She's already in Dutch somehow."

"Yeah, and wonders what the devil they've got on her. Can't be anything very definite—or! They don't hesitate, that crowd. The only way you can make good with 'em is to kill somebody. You've found out, haven't you, that they *like* blood?"

"Um-hm. And you," Everhard suggested, "like a good fellow, said to Yvette, 'Shoot!'"

"Don, you know what that girl wanted?"

"Would I be sitting here holding my breath if I did?"

"She asked me to shoot her, through the shoulder or somewhere, so it would look as if she'd made a try, and I'd beat her to it."

Everhard eyed him. "Think she meant it?"

"What d'you think?"

"She'd take it with a smile."

"You've said it. When God was handing out guts she got as much as anybody. Well, there's a phone at the hotel that doesn't go through the switchboard. I went down and used it. Got through to her father. I'd thought he was the only one that knew I was over. I explained things. You know the French police. They like theatricals—and are not ashamed of liking 'em. We like 'em too, but pretend we don't. The old boy moves fast. I went back to the room. Twenty minutes later Yvette shot through an open window. Then bolted. I dropped in a huddle—just to be realistic!

"Well, a couple of porters happened—understand?—to be heaving a trunk down the hall. They thought they'd heard a shot, saw a woman leave. They jumped into my room. One stood guard at the door and the other called the office. There happened—understand?—to be a couple of detectives in the office at the time. They took charge. Nobody that wasn't in on the play got a good look at me. And to swing it over right, they brought me here. I slept in this damn place last night. Now I'm merely bait in a mouse-trap. Anybody that comes in to see if I am really J. K. James is nailed in a hurry and hustled off to jail for questioning. Two have been caught already."

"And don't you think they can get word through to somebody that you aren't a corpse?"

"Gee, but you're a bright boy! You think of the strangest things! What I think about it is that they do get word through that I am dead. How's that?"

"Yeah?"

James grinned. "We didn't put on the real show for



you. I sneaked a look at you out there in the waiting-room and said 'Nothin' doin'!' Thought it might make you weep if you saw me stretched out in a coffin—"

"Cheated me out of a laugh, hm?"

"You wouldn't-a laughed. You'd-a broke down and cried. You see, nobody gets more than just one quick look at me, then the two detectives you saw there close in and start talking. Nice way to spend a vacation. Come across to see a good show and get dragged on the stage to play the corpse."

"When you going to be buried?"

"To-morrow. Then a private aëroplane gets me across to Germany. And I have to sneak back home again. Get down to Mexico and find my scientists. I feel like a fool. It's up to you and Yvette to bust things wide open before my vacation is up. So do something, won't you?"

"What d'you suggest?"

"Whatever she tells you to do. And say, she wonders what the hell you've done to that fellow Hovenden. He's sick o' bed, or pretends to be, and it seems you're to blame. What happened?"

"I caught him in the bedroom closet of a pretty friend of mine and shook him down for a million francs."

"Yeah?" James asked doubtfully. "Go on. Tell me just why that wasn't a bone-head play."

"Well, for one thing, having a fellow like you in the family is an awful handicap. They've got to think—the Death's-Headers—that either I'm honest or you're crooked." Everhard grinned at him. "You may not know it, but you're mixed up in dope-smuggling."

"Yeah?"

"They think maybe you are. But it was up to me to convince 'em that I wasn't your spy, trying to get coaxed to come in and learn their secrets. I gave Hovenden a going over that's knocked that spy idea clear out of their heads. Also I wanted to show 'em I'd play a dirty game. There's nothing lousier than taking money off a man that

hides in your lady friend's closet. Besides, I've had expenses. One million francs is forty thousand dollars—and I'm still in the hole."

James meditated, lighted another cigarette, rubbed his cheek with the palm of his hand, said absently, "I need a shave"; then reflectively: "The way you tell it sounds all right. But it was a damn strong play."

Everhard said nothing. Silence.

Then James reached out with his toe and kicked Everhard's foot. "Wake up. Go on. Entertain me. Show some gratitude."

"Listen. Do you know Biradou?"

James rose up, turned his back, and brushed the top of the chest. "Pins, tacks, wire, and a bad smell all over this dump. No wonder people don't want to die if they're brought to a place like this. Yes, I know him; that is, I've met Biradou. Why?"

"Is he as smart as he looks?"

"What's Biradou done?"

"Well, for one thing, he's in with that crowd."

"No?" said James.

"Yvette as much as says so."

"That kid knows," James agreed. "Pretty, don't you think?"

"Never noticed. But she's French. That's better than being merely pretty."

James grunted. "I bet Biradou has noticed. They say he has a way with ladies."

"Well, I'll say he has a way with men too. Sometimes I wonder if he's not the bird I have to get by to be made welcome among the Death's-Headers."

"Maybe so," James admitted thoughtfully.

"And see here. Supposing they do find out you are not dead?"

James stepped on the cigarette, working his toe over it. "They'd strangle her. Then say you did it—and prove it!"



"Then why the hell don't you take some sleeping-powders and stay in your coffin?"

"I'd take poison to save that kid."

"All right," Everhard suggested brightly, "I'll send some in for you."

## 3

When Everhard went out he began to look for a taxi with its flag up, and saw a black shiny car swing by with Biradou erect in the tonneau. The car pulled up at the curb. Biradou stepped out briskly and entered the undertaker's recessed doorway.

"Speak of the devil! The jig's up. He'll want to poke his fingers in the bullet-hole!" Everhard reflected unhappily.

He crossed the street and loitered. Biradou came out shortly with quick military step. The black car started off.

Everhard stepped to the curb, looking after it. A cruising taximan, seeing him there, paused.

"Follow that black car," said Everhard. "Keep it in sight. I'll pay double—and a bonus."

The driver grinned and nodded. Some blocks later the cars huddled into a traffic jam and the taxi squirmed through until the taxi-driver had a good look at the man in the tonneau. The jam broke, but the taxi drew up at the curb.

"What's the matter?"

The driver shrugged his shoulders. "It is the hour of my lunch, monsieur."

"Lunch the devil! I'll report you to the first policeman."

Another shrug. "Monsieur knows best, of course. But I know, if you please, that I do not care to be summoned to the Prefecture to explain to Monsieur Biradou why I followed him. No, no, monsieur!"

"But if you'd done it skilfully he wouldn't have known."

"Ah, monsieur, you do not know Biradou! If Monsieur will give me an address, I shall be pleased to postpone my lunch."

"Do you mean Biradou has himself followed to see that he isn't followed?"

"I mean merely, monsieur, that those who know what is good for them let Monsieur Biradou go about his business and do not meddle. An address, if you please?"

"I'll walk," said Everhard.

He walked into the first café and used the telephone. He told the undertaker: "This is Monsieur John Smith who called on you a while ago. Please may I speak with the same person I met then?"

After a time cautious voice said, "Yes?" It was James.

"I saw who came in just after I left. How'd you make out?"

"He didn't learn anything he shouldn't." James was emphatic. "Least, I'll stake my head on it!"

"Your head's nothing much to risk. It's Yvette's you're gambling with. And mine."

"Be careful of it. The street's watched. They want to see who comes. Biradou was so glad to see me in the coffin he went away happy."

"I'd like to see you there too. I'm coming back."

"Stay away! Good-by."

4

That night Everhard went to a circus, more to feed sugar to the horses during the intermission than to watch the show.

As he came out with the crowd he had the feeling that he was being followed, but there were too many people on the street for him to be sure. He drove to a café near the Madeleine, lingered until the after-theater crowd was off the street, then set out to walk.

He followed the embankment of the Seine. The night



charm of Paris is dangerously near sorcery. He kept a wary lookout for any sign of being followed. Here and there shadowy forms shuffled through the bright spots of street lamps and moved off invisibly into the gloom; but long before he reached the Place du Parvis-Notre-Dame, he had said to himself: "I must be getting jumpy. I'll bet all Death's-Headers are at home in bed, like good honest fellows!"

The Parvis is a wide open space that fronts the cathedral. Napoleon cleared away some score of houses so there could be a larger crowd to cheer when he went to church. At night, after midnight especially, hardly any one ever crosses it.

Everhard stopped near the statue of Charlemagne, and paused with a look about to see if any one was near. Then he leaned forward on his stick to enjoy the pleasing night scene. It happens that the cathedral is rather heavy in daylight, lacking the aërial skyward surge of many cathedrals; but at night Notre Dame seems veritably to leave the earth and float motionless. It is merely an optical illusion, but so are most miracles. He was thinking what prayers the evil gargoyles, perched half-way to heaven but leering earthward, must have overheard in the thousand years, or almost that, since Notre Dame rooted its seedling stones in the soil of Paris and grew into a cathedral.

A voice at his elbow said: "Pardon, Monsieur Richmond. May I speak with you?"

Everhard turned sharply. It is very gloomy on the Parvis, but not so dark that you can't see the blot-like shapes of people at a distance, and near-by faces quite clearly enough to know what they are like.

The voice at his elbow was not unpleasant in a way, being a strong voice that spoke softly, but there was something vibrantly sinister about it. Everhard knew that somewhere he had heard that voice before.

The man was bareheaded, slightly hunchbacked, and

wore a long cape. The face was gauntly angular. His eyes were deep in bony sockets and glistened. He had taken off his hat either as a gesture of politeness or to let Everhard have a full look at his face. At first glance he seemed a man who had suffered, was suffering greatly—but not resignedly.

"Monsieur, you admire the miniatures of the rings?"

"You're right I do. We've talked over the phone, haven't we? Yes, I recognize your voice. No finer work has ever been done in miniatures."

"Monsieur," pride flashed in the voice. He bowed, "I am the artist."

"This is an honor!" said Everhard, putting out his hand.

The artist tucked his hat under his arm, hastily stripped off a glove, and offered as delicate a hand as ever a man presented. It was cold as a snake's tail, but there was no weakness in those delicate fingers; nor in the voice that replied calmly: "More of an honor than you perhaps realize, monsieur. Men come to me. I do not go to them. Monsieur, you have heard of La Tête de Mort?"

"Yes, some. Why?"

"I am the artist of La Tête de Mort. It is I, monsieur, who look into the faces of the men in whom trust is reposed. There has been so much talk of you that to-night I gave way to curiosity. When you were in the café I was called. You walked. I liked that. You have no fear. And I could tell that you too think Paris beautiful at night. I followed, and when you paused here, I spoke."

"You are an artist at shadowing too."

"No one may see me except when I choose, monsieur. And now if you will please give me the Kurlingen ring, I shall perhaps some day soon return to you the portrait."

He held out the delicate hand. Everhard took the ring from a vest pocket and gave it over, saying, "You paint under a magnifying-glass?"

"No no, not at all," the artist said quickly, and, with



lift of fingers toward his face: "These eyes do not fail me. I search for brave men, monsieur. There are so few in the world. We perhaps shall meet again, soon."

He pulled at the brim of his hat, threw his long coat about him with sweep of arm, and turned, going quickly toward the equestrian statue of Charlemagne. As he neared it he seemed really to vanish, so completely was the long black cloak merged into the darkness of the pedestal. Everhard saw a faint shadowy movement pass round the pedestal, and, watching, saw nothing more.

"That bozo," said Everhard moodily, "is worth all the rest of 'em that I've seen, put together. He is one that could tell things if you stood him up in a corner and poked pins in him."

## 5

Everhard climbed the three flights of steep stairs and let himself into his apartment. As he closed the door behind him he stiffened alertly, watching, listening, sniffing. There was the unmistakable smell of perfume, like the wispy trace of a woman's presence.

He went into the front room. "Hello, Cluckee. Been waiting long?"

She smiled at him from the disarray of blankets that she had gathered about her as she sat in the big chair before the cold fireplace. "Ages."

"Burnt up all the wood, I see. Where's my fat Kewpie?"

"I sent her to bed. She was glad to go."

"What are you doing here? Won't they think things?"

"Yes, perhaps that I am in love with you."

"I hope you aren't trying to fool them, Cluckee."

She made a pretty face at him. "Be quiet. They trust me again, now that they think I killed—do you know?"

"Yes." Everhard sat down on the edge of the table, stripped the glove from his left hand, and said casually:

"I went to see the corpse. Looked very natural. Just after I came out, I saw Biradou go in."

"Ah." She watched him intently.

"You know, Cluckee, I think you and—" he tapped his breast—"Monsieur Richmond here could possibly save ourselves some annoyance if we jumped in the river together, now."

"You think he has learned something, eh?" She asked it coolly, without alarm, but shook the blankets from her shoulders and sat up, interested.

"James says no. But James is human. And Biradou—every time I cut the trail of that crowd, there he is. Aloof, watchful, with a look about him that makes me think he knows more of what is going on than anybody."

"Oh, how can you say that!"

"I can say a lot more. Aren't you afraid of him?"

"No," she said and fiddled with a ring. Without looking up: "Perhaps I am wrong. I've felt he really liked me. I talked with him early this evening and—" her dark eyes lifted, smilingly—"he has been terribly irritated wondering what an earth you did with Fifi Guyot."

"Drag the Seine."

"Ah, so?"

"I choked her. Tied a sack of cobblestones to her feet. Nice splash they made. Only way to handle some women." He flapped the glove at his knee.

"Poor Fifi. She does look sadly abused."

"Hm?"

"She is in jail now. The neighbors called in the police."

"Face scratched?"

"Terribly."

"Did she talk?"

"She did."

"Does Biradou believe her?"

"Oh, I hope not! The things she told of you, my dear Monsieur Richmond! She went to live with you because she was afraid of you; she ran away from you because she



was afraid of you. And you wanted her to lure men to her apartment so you could rob them."

"That's awfully near the truth—for Fifi." Reflectively: "Biradou must have enjoyed himself."

"Yes, perhaps. He told her that the money you demanded of Hovenden was merely to repay what you had borrowed to give to me."

"Poor Fifi!" Everhard murmured, amused.

"And how did you know I wouldn't spend that money?"

"Good guesser, I am."

"That was wonderful of you. But do tell me, please, how *did* you get him into Fifi's closet?"

"Fifi put him there. I didn't. I just took him out."

"Monsieur Biradou," she said, peering into the mirror of her handbag, "is looking for a young artist-sort of fellow who talked with Hovenden at the Horse Shoe."

"Hovenden tell him?"

"The club secretary, I think. He and Monsieur Biradou are close friends."

Everhard walked across the room with her amused glance following. He glanced at her quickly, but was not quick enough: she stared fixedly at the cold ashes of the fireplace. He went back to the table and sat on the corner, picked up the glove, and tossed it aside.

"I don't like that fellow. He's cold, keen, cruel. He won't stop. He'd use any means to get what he wants. The first morning I was in Paris he jumped at me. The first week, planted a housekeeper on me here—"

"He did?"

"A fine cook, too. Made the best coffee in Paris."

"Did she tell you Monsieur Biradou put her in here?"

"No. Everybody's scared to death of him. I told her he did. She wouldn't admit it. Looks queer the way that fellow—"

"But my dear boy, you forget who you are. You are really the terrible Don Everhard, you know. Pirate, gam-

bler, and, oh, such a dreadful man! Naturally Monsieur Biradou would want to keep his eye on you—no?”

“You don’t say that quite as if you meant it. Yet I suppose it is the truth, after all. But say the best that you can about him, and you still have to admit that he knows you are connected with La Tête de Mort. He’s one of ’em—or, in your words, wants to be. And remember, Cluckee, he’ll throw you to the wolves, sure, when the shake-up comes. Or try to. He’s on the pay-roll, too, isn’t he?”

“I myself have given him money, if that’s what you mean,” she said, choosing a cigarette.

Everhard gave her a look, arose, and again walked across the room, returned to the table’s corner. “There’s something wrong, somewhere, Cluckee. You’re holding out on me. He knows damn well Kurlingen was murdered. He knew it the minute he stepped in. He knew it before he stepped in. Why doesn’t he do something about it?” Everhard nodded. “He grabbed Guyot out of my closet and let ’em kill him in prison. Fifi’s talked her head off, too.”

“Oh, why of course he knows Kurlingen was murdered!” she said. Then admiringly: “And he knows that *you* must have done what you did do, because—”

“What did I do?”

“—because there is no other possible explanation. So there! And if you want the truth, dear boy, he thinks the Death’s Head would be very fortunate to get you in.”

“Hm. I see. So they think a lot more of me, hm?”

“They do. And so does my father. If you went into the Death’s Head as a murderer, they would have you under their thumb. And I don’t think they are through trying, either, so—”

“Oh, by the way, Cluckee. I heard your name to-day. James told me.”

She almost jumped from the chair, then sank back, laughing at him. He nodded, trying to be convincing; but she shook her head.



"Yvette—"

"Yes. What else?"

"All right. As usual, you win. But how did you ever come to be Isobel de Nevers, Cluckee?"

"Ah," she sighed, looking down at her hands. "Very well. When it was known that my brother was dead, my father said, 'Come, Yvette, you are young, but that is an advantage, since they will not suspect you of being also wise.' So I was given a story to tell of my birth, of what village I came, and with what little money my father could give me I began to appear in the cafés in a blonde wig. I was frequently arrested, and men began to be interested in me. Did I spare their purses? No," she said defiantly, looking straight at him, "I did not! When my father had given of his poor savings I took what fools offered and heartlessly discarded them. Then some poor boy of good family, worn out with drugs and dissipation, killed himself. It was announced to the papers that he had killed himself after spending all on Isobel de Nevers. And how that made me famous! Soon I had admirers of great wealth. Then I bought a wig that startled even Paris, and jewels too. I soon was supposed to be the cause of other suicides. That is great fame, in Paris. The Death's Head became interested in me. And so far I have never failed them. That is all there is to tell. And what do you think of me—now?"

"A lot more than I did. Which also was a lot."

Yvette smiled, gratified.

"By the way, Cluckee, who is a vulture-headed fellow named Balzar?"

"I never heard of him. Why?" Yvette's voice and manner changed instantly.

Everhard told her; then asked, "And do you know about the artist who does those portraits for the rings?"

"No, but I've wondered. They are amazing."

"So is he," said Everhard, and described the meeting.

Yvette listened tensely. Then with admiring flash of

eyes: "You are amazing, yourself, to stir up such big fish and bring them to the surface." Then, with the tinkle of teasing back in her voice: "Would you tell me, please, just who is one Monsieur Kiro—who is suspected of exporting drugs in soap?"

Everhard grinned at her.

"They have demanded that I get the secret out of you, somehow. They say you cannot possibly have known that your conversation was overheard."

"You know, Cluckee, they're not so smart, after all. Just twenty words over the telephone, and they imagine that I've got a big secret dope-running organization of my own, hm?"

"You are very . . . very . . . very clever!" Yvette said commendingly, in a low, slow tone, and with a glow in her moist dark eyes.

"This game's nothing but poker, with people for cards. And Biradou's the joker—wild."

"Oh, why do you give Monsieur Biradou so much importance, please?"

"He's smart as the devil and as dangerous. Look at the way he promptly punished Guyot!"

Yvette shook her head, correcting him. "I will tell you something interesting. In a hollow button on Guyot's coat was some powder. When these buttons are given you, you are told that if ever arrested you must say nothing, because you need not worry. Just secretly take the little powder. You will then appear dead. No physician can tell that you are not really dead. Your body will then be removed from the jail and claimed by friends."

"I see. So the little powder fooled Monsieur Biradou."

"No no, my dear boy. It fooled merely Monsieur Guyot. So enticing, the story of the death-like sleep."

"God! how they like people to die! But, then, I'll bet Biradou knew he had the button. Didn't he?"

"Perhaps," she said calmly.

"Clever."



"And terrible!" Yvette's voice rose. She stood up, brushed at her dress, and went to him, putting a hand on his arm. "And they are still determined to get *you* into a trap. So, please, there is something I want you to do. Will you? That is why I have come to-night. Promise?" Her arm moved coaxingly across his shoulder. "Promise?"

"I'll listen."

"You know de Rossi's—"

"The diamond shop?"

"To-morrow evening, just after dusk, will you go in there and at the point of a gun make them give you—"

"Not I, sweet child!"

"But you must!" She shook him, insisting.

"Didn't I show 'em what I was willing to do when I shook Hovenden down? What more do they want?"

"They want you to be afraid of the police."

"I am. That's why I won't hold up de Rossi's."

"But please!" Yvette choked a little, then emphatically: "Don't you understand? It is arranged."

"For de Rossi to hand over a sack of diamonds—to a stranger?"

"No no no! Paste."

"That's different."

"Then you will, won't you?"

"Your father has fixed it with de Rossi?"

Yvette nodded quickly: "Yes, my father. Of course. Who else? You will? Please! And to-morrow?"

"But suppose there is a some sort of slip-up, and I am caught?"

"Oh, then of course La Tête de Mort will get you free, somehow. They will then have you in their power, but it will not be as if for murder. Don't you understand?"

Everhard once more picked up his glove, slowly pulled at each separate finger, tossed the glove away. "You want them to think, I suppose, that I have stolen the diamonds for you?"

"Why, of course!" Her arm lay lightly about his shoulder, her wrist curved at his neck, caressingly.

"Clever idea, in a way," he said and turned.

Yvette's arm fell. He put his arm about her, drew her close, looked scrutinizingly into her face—and pulled her nose.

She pushed at his hand. "Don't. But if you want to be nice, promise. Then you may kiss me."

"That a bribe?"

"No. A reward." She laughed.

Everhard kissed her, and she said, "So you do promise?"

"Not yet. I just accepted some advance payment. Can always return it, you know."

"Deceiving wretch!" He sat on the table's corner, and she stood caressingly close. "Promise?"

"If so, then what?"

"You will just go in, level your gun, demand the diamonds, and walk out. What could be easier? No?"

"Lots of things. Supposing I do it. Get caught—or don't. And La Tête de Mort suddenly decides they don't want such a damn fool playing marbles on their side? I'm in jail, or have the police scouring Paris."

"But paste? It will be all right, dear."

"Diamond merchants have lost paste, and jarred the insurance companies for the value of real stones."

"But de Rossi's! No no no. It will be all right if you will do the thing as if you meant it."

"No no no," he repeated, shaking his head. "Not so good."

"Then you won't?"

"Of course I will. But I want you to know that I'm not jumping up and down with glee. It's not up to what I think is your best, Cluckee."

Yvette sighed, closed her eyes, leaned against him as if resting after a long nervous strain. A moment later, with head still lowered, she suddenly clutched him, and begged



coaxingly, "And please, whatever happens—at any time—please, please, don't lose faith in me!" She raised her face; her dark eyes glowed as if with fever, and begglingly: "You won't, will you—ever?"

"No, of course not," said Everhard, putting his arm around her. He watched her for a moment, then quite gently: "Whenever a woman talks that way, Cluckee, she's got something up her sleeve."

"Oh!" Her look was startled.

"It's all right—in a way. You're holding out on me. Yet if James is willing to do a vaudeville stunt in an undertaking parlor to give you a break, I can risk it. But I'll tell you right now—so you can change your plans accordingly—that you are going to be fooled in one thing, sister."

Yvette looked at him, tense and questioning. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said softly, with a pause after each word, the better to give emphasis, "that I am not going to get caught."

"Oh? Why . . . why you don't think . . . please!"

"Not so good, Cluckee. But I'm just trying to be frank with you. I don't know what's what, but I'll play on your side. Only, wouldn't it be a lot nicer if you told me the truth?"

"The truth is, you stupid man, I do love you!"

Everhard got off the table, gently pushed her aside, and walked away, taking the glove with him. He stood at the cold fireplace, with his shoulders against the mantel, fiddled with the glove, then tossed it to the floor.

"Cluckee, why don't you play fair? Why try Fifi's game? You know I'm on your side. You don't have to pull that sort of thing on me—not as if you meant it. I mean, wanted me to think you meant it."

Yvette, from across the room, with her hands behind her and holding to the table, looked at him anxiously, questioning but not speaking.

"It was all right when you were trying me out. It's all right now as long as you don't pretend you mean it. Act serious about it, and you're not as smart as I thought. I know you do really like me. Of course. That's enough. The Fifi stuff is out. I'm telling you! Hell, you'd throw me, or any man, to the wolves to beat La Tête de Mort! And I don't blame—more than don't blame you for it. In fact, I like you for it. You're a lot nicer that way, Cluckee, than if you let a flutter in your heart make a fool of you. Make you forget they tortured your brother and murdered him. But don't try to make a fool of me, either. Understand, Cluckee?"

Yvette nodded tremblingly and broken smiles came and went on her mouth. She looked at the back of her hand absently, tossed the hand, and went to her chair, sat down, picked up the handbag, opened it, lifted her head, and raised the little mirror. Wandering fingers touched her hat and hair. She smiled at herself and murmured inaudibly, "I told you once, didn't I, that I should feel sorry for you if you did end by loving him?" She snapped the bag, dropped it to the floor, took up a cigarette.

Everhard came near, picked up the matches from the floor, struck one, held it for her, and shook it out.

Smilingly she said: "It is so nice that you do understand. Makes it easier. So many men would demand the other thing, too!"

He tossed the matches to her lap. "Cluckee, to play your game, go through what you've gone through—the strain of it! Any man would have caved in long ago. Only a woman can take it and smile."



## *Chapter Eighteen*

### 1

EVERHARD moved to the inner edge of the late afternoon crowd on the Rue de la Paix and paused before de Rossi's brightly lighted window.

Diamonds, as if diamonds were an inexpensive merchandise, lay twinkling on dark velvet. He leaned forward on his stick and scrutinized the gems with a seeming idler's interest; and after a time glanced at de Rossi's closed door, hung with opaque curtains. In the exclusive Parisian way, enticement was offered but not invitation. The house of de Rossi had queens for customers, rich Americans, especially South Americans.

Everhard went in. It was a small shop with a dark, almost black, tone of simple decoration, relieved by traceries of gold. Diamonds are at an advantage against dark backgrounds in a bright light.

A dumpy tawny woman and a full-blown daughter were the only customers. Seldom more than one or two customers were in de Rossi's at a time. For long hours, none at all. The dumpy matron and her daughter sat in big carved high-backed chairs before a low counter and were talking in Spanish to a small young man who, without eagerness but very attentively, was showing dinner-rings.

A man with mildly keen dark eyes came submissively toward Everhard, and under the salesman's humbleness tried to conceal his effort at an appraisal of the stranger's financial resources and weaknesses. Princes incognito, hopeful of pleasing some impudent girl, and New York gangsters, meaning to make holiday expenses by smuggling home a pocketful of gems, came to de Rossi's; and

all the classes in between, excepting the fastidious aristocrats who feel that diamonds are garish, only pearls elegant.

"Monsieur?" said the salesman, blandly, a polished fellow accustomed to pleasing rich persons.

"You speak English, of course?"

"Yes sir."

"That's good. You see," said Everhard, swinging open both top-coat and suit coat, disclosing a thick sheaf of franc notes that stood up in his inside pocket, "I've just won the Cuban lottery. And a friend, he tells me diamonds are going up in value. Better than stocks. Never be so low again. What d'you think, hm?"

The salesman complimented the far-sighted judgment of the worthy friend and studied Everhard's face, but he was studying one of the best poker faces that ever looked across green baize.

Everhard asked to look at certain pieces in the window, including a collar, an elaborate thing of intense solid brilliancy. A moment later he heard the low muffled buzz of a bell.

At once a well-fed small man, with a half-bald grayish head, and eyes more blandly keen than the salesman's, came from the back of the shop. He wore a cutaway coat with bird-winged tails that looked as if they might spread and flap. He addressed Everhard courteously.

Everhard answered laboriously: "Jay nee compreeny-vuz—not at all. Jay parlee only Angleesh, Muss-seer," and bowed.

The salesman introduced the half-bald grayish man as Monsieur de Rossi himself, explained Everhard's interest in diamonds; and Monsieur de Rossi exclaimed admiringly at the perspicacious friend's good judgment in advising the investment. Sharp, tricky eyes, de Rossi had.

Everhard examined the collar while the two men talked together rapidly in French. The younger said: "Of course he is lying. He means to smuggle them into America. To



say one is buying diamonds as an investment! That is the usual story. He has asked for the collar, but you will see that what he buys are unset stones."

"Good," said Monsieur de Rossi. "We shall notify the American Customs as usual, and gladly give him whatever he can pay for."

The American Government secretly rewards informers with one third of the fine levied on undeclared goods, and never reveals the name of the informer—which is usually the foreign merchant who has sold the goods, though the merchants lie like hell in denying it.

Everhard let the collar lie across his fingers and watched the luscious Spanish girl. She noticed, tossed her head with hauteur, and a moment later peeked hopefully. Merchant and salesman exchanged amused glances.

Everhard haggled, wanting a bargain. He said: "I have a million francs with me and two more under the mattress in my room. Here, I'll show you." He laid the bundle of francs on the counter, indifferently. "Count 'em." With that he turned away, waited, caught the Spanish girl's eye, and winked.

She returned a cold stare until sure her mother was not noticing, then smiled shyly. Everhard casually picked up his francs and returned them to his pocket. "I think I'll take this collar . . . perhaps. Let me see some rings. Oh, and unset stones, too."

Salesman and merchant exchanged bland glances. Moreover, they soon saw that the American knew diamonds pretty well, though he pretended to know nothing about them.

"A dealer!" said Monsieur de Rossi to his salesman. "Very clever. We must look at his passport to be sure of his name. Learn where he is stopping."

The Spanish matron concluded her purchase and left, with her reluctant daughter glancing back.

Everhard then became more attentive to the bargaining. He laid piece after piece aside, then: "More unset

stones, too!" Presently he waved his hand at the selection he had made; asked, "How much does all this figure out?"

They began to examine the jewelry and stones he had laid aside, and to write on a pad. Everhard shifted pieces and changed his mind confusingly, and began to show some irritability, disputed quoted prices, putting salesman and merchant into a fret of anxiety.

"My friend," said Everhard, buttoning his coat, picking up his stick, "told me to come to de Rossi's or go to Landry's. I think I'll see what Landry's offers. I'm paying cash and buying diamonds—not costume jewelry. I don't like the way you don't get things straight."

"Monsieur!" de Rossi protested with a sound of agony.

"Why can't we sit down alone and figure things out? He," Everhard accused the helpful salesman, "keeps butting in."

"Ah, pardon!" said de Rossi, with hopeful gleam of eye. "Certainly. Just come into my private office. Bring monsieur's selection. The name, monsieur?"

"Jones," said Everhard. "William Harrington Jones."

"Bring Monsieur Jones's selection. Come, Monsieur Jones."

They went up a short flight of plush-covered steps and entered a small office. Everhard glanced about. He had hoped for a back door. There wasn't any. A huge safe stood almost flush with the wall.

The salesman arranged the tray by de Rossi's elbow at the small table, and backed from the room, closing the door softly.

"Now monsieur," said de Rossi, "let us begin. This collar. I have made you a very special price of three hundred and forty thousand francs. A bargain, monsieur. I lose money on it, but—"

Everhard said in French, "Pardon!" and leveled an automatic.



De Rossi gasped, with backward tilt in the chair and upward flip of soft hands.

"Don't give a signal, now—or later! If you have any doubts as to whether I will shoot, look at me more carefully, monsieur."

The look Everhard gave him was very convincing to Monsieur de Rossi.

Everhard gathered up the stuff off the tray by the hand-ful and dropped it into his overcoat pocket.

De Rossi, after the first explosive astonishment, took the thing rather calmly. He said: "Monsieur, I am insured. The heaviest part of the loss will not fall on me. But please permit me to explain, monsieur, that you cannot possibly escape. There is no back exit, and the moment you try to dash through the front—"

"Pardon, Monsieur de Rossi. I shall do no dashing. And since you are a gentleman, it will be a pleasure to have your company. I know that there are push-buttons placed conveniently, which, if touched, will instantly lock the front door so that the ordinary thief has a poor chance to get away. Permit me to suggest that I am not an ordinary thief."

"Very true, monsieur," said de Rossi, nervously.

"And may I ask if my presence here is wholly unexpected? You have no little package of paste—"

"Paste, monsieur? Never permitted in de Rossi's!"

"Thank you. I now see it all perfectly. There has been a slight misunderstanding. It's quite all right. I am not wholly surprised. But now please be very attentive to what I say, Monsieur de Rossi, for I shall tell you what to do and say and how to act. You will escort me from your store, and accompany me. And I warn you, Monsieur de Rossi, that if either in the store or on the street you give the least little faint suggestion of being displeased with my company . . . ah, monsieur, I should so dislike to give your family the sad pleasure of enjoying your

life-insurance! But," said Everhard, playing poker, "one false move and I'll kill you."

De Rossi gasped. He had never before in all of his life realized that look and words could have so much the effect of a blow.

Everhard then gave de Rossi rather detailed instructions, with a gesture toward the safe.

Monsieur de Rossi pushed a button. A man that Everhard had not previously seen came in. De Rossi wiped his sweating forehead, but was otherwise almost composed, though rather tense. "Monsieur Erolde, I present you to Monsieur Jones. Monsieur Jones has just made a large selection of choice stones. I have put them, together with one million francs, in the safe here. And am now going with him around to the Hotel Crillon."

De Rossi then turned the key of a compartment in the safe, put the key into his pocket, and, with the help of Erolde, got into his top-coat, took hat and stick. Erolde accompanied them down the plush-covered steps into the shop, where both salesmen were now being attentive to a slim dark woman that de Rossi greeted unctuously as "Countess." He assured her that he would be right back and assist in any selection that she cared to make.

De Rossi and Everhard went through the front door together.

"Monsieur de Rossi," said Everhard approvingly as they stood at the curb to catch a taxi, "you are a fine fellow. Your manager, Erolde, noticed that you are a little nervous, and wonders; but otherwise you are admirable. But remember, not a flicker out of you—and now what the devil!"

Monsieur Biradou was right there, very erect, with head up, and neat square-cut beard advanced like an insignia of rank. His dark eyes struck purposefully on Everhard's face, then demandingly on de Rossi's moist face as he moved from wall to curb through the shifting crowd.



"Play the game!" said Everhard warningly, with a hand on de Rossi's arm. The next instant he bowed a little, and said: "Ah, my friend Monsieur Biradou! Please, may I introduce you to Monsieur—"

"De Rossi and I are old friends," said Biradou, crisply. He looked at his old friend expectantly, and with imperative demand.

"I have just explained to Monsieur de Rossi," said Everhard, "that I recently came into possession of a considerable sum of money. And since it is necessary for me to have certain diamonds this evening, we are now on our way to my apartment for the money and—"

"You are taking the diamonds with you, Monsieur de Rossi?" Biradou asked warningly.

Everhard's fingers furtively closed on de Rossi's arm, and de Rossi said at once: "Oh no. Not at all! I . . . they are in the safe."

Everhard smoothly caught up the explanation, "But as soon as I turn the money over to him, he will send them at once, as directed, to a certain very lovely person."

Biradou's slim fine hand daintily stroked his beard. He looked more demandingly than ever at de Rossi; but de Rossi looked more determinedly than ever at passing cars, watching for a taxi.

"It would be pleasant to have you accompany us, if you like, Monsieur Biradou," Everhard suggested, just a little mockingly.

Monsieur Biradou also, perhaps, had never played much poker. He gave Everhard a queer look of irritated and contemptuous disappointment, hesitated, then with crisp, bitter twitch of lips, "*Mouscaille!*"—the same being, in jargon, an undependable fellow, fit only for cleaning sewers. With that, Biradou swung on his heel and marched off.

"Here is a taxi," said de Rossi, and waved his stick, nervously signaling.

They got in. "To the Concorde Metro," said Everhard;

then to de Rossi: "Please accept my sincere appreciation for your courteous help. I see now that Monsieur Biradou was tipped off as to what I meant to do. Live and learn—never to trust a woman, Monsieur de Rossi. Personally, I believe that you have good reasons to assure the insurance companies that you will most probably recover your stones. Monsieur Biradou is a clever man, but for this once he couldn't imagine what the devil was happening, and so guessed wrong. But what he says to you when he learns the truth will be most painful to hear."

The taxi stopped.

"You may now return to your store," said Everhard, getting out. Standing at the open door, he lifted his hat and held out his hand. "Good-by. And may I thank you, monsieur?"

De Rossi drew back into a corner and held his hands against his sides. He said nothing, but stared hatefully. Then he leaned out of the cab to watch Everhard walk unhurriedly to the underground entrance and disappear down the stairs.

## 2

Everhard closed the automatic elevator, sent it down, stepped across the hall, and rang the bell.

A slim thin-faced dark maid in high heels, lace cap, lace-fringed apron, opened the door and stared uninvitingly. She had lustful eyes and the mouth of a snake.

"Mademoiselle Colbert, if you please."

"Your name, monsieur, if you please?"

"Monsieur Richmond."

The dark-eyed maid stepped back, as if reluctantly.

Everhard entered the hallway. The maid coldly held out her hand for hat and stick and watched with disfavor as he removed his coat. Something was wrong somewhere. She led the way into the living-room and said: "Please be seated. Mademoiselle Colbert will come, presently."

There was a peculiar inflection on the "presently"; and



he soon began to understand why. He sauntered about the room, turning at every sound, but Yvette did not come. He sat down before the fire, meditating. He groped idly among the loose jewels that he had transferred to the pocket of his suit coat. He shifted to another chair and took up a magazine. He looked at his watch and noted that almost an hour had passed. Yvette chose to keep him waiting, and the maid had known that she would.

Yvette came in languidly, a cigarette in her fingers. She wore black; a plain black dress with high close-fitting collar, even black stockings, and there were large plaited buns over her ears. She glanced at him with aloof disinterest, said, "Good evening," casually, and flipped the ashes from her cigarette. She lifted her eyes coldly, asked, "Well?" and turned away, taking up a magazine as she sat down.

Everhard eyed her thoughtfully, but could not quite guess it. "You don't look happy," he suggested.

"No?" She turned the magazine, not looking up.

"Who's dead?"

"Nobody that I know of." Yvette seemed interested in a perfume advertisement.

"Not so good, black—and buns."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm in mourning for an idea. It has died, completely." Without lifting her eyes from the magazine she reached out and mashed her cigarette on the tray.

Everhard was sadly puzzled. He glanced about the room. She had warned him of listeners, spies, microphones. He went near her, his hands in his coat pocket.

The hand came out with the diamond collar. He dangled it before her, but she did not look up. He put it on the top of the magazine and let it slip down into her lap. She would not lift her eyes, but groping fingers picked it up, felt of it sensitively; then, reaching absently toward the table, she laid it beside the cigarette-tray.

Her face lifted. Her eyes, straight and hard, looked at

him. "Of course, you can always return it, and get your money back, you know." She touched one bun, then the other, eying him. Her glance fell interestedly on a facial-cream advertisement.

Everhard said: "Now I know why nice boys are said to have blown their brains out on your doorstep. You'd make a polar bear shiver."

He pushed a small bronze elephant out of the way and sat on a corner of the library table and looked at her thoughtfully. The magazine rustled as she turned a page, looking for more advertisements.

"I'm beginning to get it, Cluckee. All of it."

"Please do not call me that!" Her tone was cold, firm, and she studied the picture of a corset. "You may take your diamonds, and go. Never return."

"And I'd like something to read, too. A phone book," he said firmly.

Yvette with languid insolence, inattentively, reached for a push-button. Somewhere a buzzer whirled faintly.

The slim thin-faced maid appeared. "You rang, mademoiselle?"

Yvette without stirring said, "The telephone book for monsieur."

The maid shot a glance at Everhard, approached the wall, pulled out a drawer, took a phone book, then pressed a button and brought the telephone to view. She crossed to Everhard and held out the book, coldly.

"Thank you, so much," said Everhard. She made a reluctant, abrupt curtsy, and turned. "One moment, please," he said.

The maid faced him. Yvette peeked furtively over the top of the magazine. Everhard took a handful of diamond trinkets and loose stones from the side coat pocket, selected a ring with an oblong cluster of diamonds, and offered it, saying: "Paste, of course, mademoiselle—so I was told. But such good paste that it will fool every one. May I? To you?"



The maid hesitatingly glanced at Yvette, but Yvette was reading, absorbed.

"No thank you, monsieur," said the maid, tempted, and started to turn.

Everhard tossed the ring. She caught it, peered at it, glanced wonderingly at him, and went away, looking repeatedly at the ring.

He examined the telephone list, poked his finger at a number, closed the book, laid it aside, and went to the phone. In a moment he was saying:

"'Herald'? City editor, if you please. . . . City editor? If you please, I am Mademoiselle de Rossi's chauffeur, and mademoiselle has been trying in vain to get through to her father's store to learn if there is any truth in the report that . . . Please, just a moment, and mademoiselle herself will speak to you."

"I have nothing to inquire about," Yvette said coldly, laying the magazine aside and taking up another.

Everhard put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Come to this phone!" It was as if he looked across a poker table and said, "Pay me!"

His tone lifted her eyes; and the look in his eyes lifted her out of the chair. She stared at him as she crossed to the phone, and she turned, following him with her glance as he walked away. He returned to a corner of the table where he sat swinging a foot and staring at the fire.

"This is Mademoiselle de Rossi. . . . Ah! . . . What do you say! . . . *Five million francs!* Oh, how dreadful! . . . And Monsieur Biradou himself saw . . . spoke . . . Oh! Oh!"

Yvette slowly replaced the telephone on its rack. Very slowly she pushed the telephone into the compartment and closed it. She looked across at Everhard's back and with slow, lingering steps approached him, and paused. Then she went around in front of him, stood there, and gazed pleadingly. He did not see her, but opened a novel and fingered the pages.

Yvette murmured, begging, "If I get down on my knees, will you?"

"Not if you crawled on 'em from here to Jerusalem and back!" He looked at her: it was the look he would have given a friend caught cheating at cards.

"I'm sorry." Her slim lithe body had a suppliant's humbleness. "Oh, I might have known you wouldn't . . . but I didn't! Oh, please!"

"I might have known some things too, but I didn't. Not till I saw your friend Biradou waiting to nail me."

"Can't I explain?"

"Go ahead and try."

"Oh, I know what you think!"

Everhard shook his head, smiling: "Oh no you don't! No. I think Fifi Guyot a wise, trustworthy little virgin—comparatively, that is."

Yvette's face grew pale, as tense as when one suffers pain silently. The slim hands hung loosely. He was glad that she did not try to touch him, playing the woman's tricky game of coaxing. At least she took without a whimper what was coming to her.

A brocaded runner, intermingled with rich browns and dull gold, lay on the table. He pulled it, and wadded it into a kind of nest. His hands dipped into the side coat pocket. His fingers dripped glittering gems into the brocaded nest.

"Very good. Everything has been explained to de Rossi, eh? By 'my father,' of course! Who else? Well, Cluckee, here you are. I said I'd do it. So they'd think I did it for you. Here they are. But if you are wise, send 'em back to de Rossi."

His fingers scooped at the pocket. A few more unset stones fell with glittering click into the nest.

"That's all. All of them. And I warned you, didn't I, that I wouldn't get caught? But you thought—just because the great Biradou got to a telephone and said so—that I'd beat your little frame-up by spending Hoven-



den's million francs. Thought I'd lie and say I stole 'em, hm? Thought I'd four-flush on you."

"Please!"

"Oh, I'm not blaming you, Cluckee. No no no! Cats scratch and women cheat. That's God's fault—not theirs. I said I knew you'd throw me or any man to the wolves. I didn't think the wolf would be Biradou. You've been holding out on me all along about that fellow. What devil's game you're playing with him, I don't know. But you win, Cluckee. I'm caught. He knows whom to look for. This frame-up does get me. I can dodge for a day or two, maybe. Not longer. But I know now how he knew so well what passports I carried. You went through my things once upon a time—remember? Missed your lunch to do it!—on the *Trivilia*—"

Yvette made a trembling gesture with both hands reaching toward him. Almost inaudibly, in faint agonized whisper: "Every word you say is overheard!"

Everhard nodded. With no change of tone he went on: "On the trivial pretext of not being hungry! 'The woman without a heart!' But not without courage. Nor other intensely feminine characteristics, such as deceit! You wanted to please Biradou—"

"Shh-h-h!" It was scarcely more than a trembling gasp, and her body grew rigid, her eyes imploring.

"Don't lie to me. You know it, and everybody else knows it. Can be no secret about that! And now if your pretty maid, or butler, or handsome chauffeur hasn't already notified the police that I am here, don't! I'm warning you. My price is four hours' start. And tell your friend Biradou to stay away from me. Somebody'll get me, all right. But I'll be damned if he gets the credit. And if he makes a try for it, he'll get hurt. Understand, Cluckee?"

She nodded weakly, but her eyes pleaded.

"Good-by, Cluckee."

"Don't go!"

"Ho ho. Yes. Must. For one thing, I'm going to drop in at a little birthday party. Pay Dodalus back the money I sent you. Won't stay long. But I keep promises—to friends."

He idly ran his fingers among the jewels, letting them drip.

Yvette, with clenched fist to her mouth, shook her head, begging. Her dark eyes had a terrified stare. Through the audible breathing against her clenched fist came the insistent vague: "Don't! Don't! Don't go! Don't leave me! Please don't go—"

Everhard laughed at her, quietly. "Clever kid, Cluckee. I missed college; but it doesn't matter, now that I've known you. One thing more. I'll be nabbed in a day or two. But don't interest yourself in how I make out. Understand? I'll plead guilty, and take it—maybe. But I'll not take any help from strangers—like you."

He turned his back on her, adjusted his coat, felt in his pocket to see if there was another loose stone, and patted the empty pocket, then turned toward her again.

Yvette stood with one hand on the table as if supporting herself, the other toyed with the small bronze elephant. Her face dropped too quickly for him to see the look with which she had been staring at him, and she stood with an air of half-timid furtive guiltiness. Her hand moved from the bronze elephant as if the thing had suddenly become red-hot.

Everhard put his palm under her chin, lifted her face. She looked at him steadily. Her eyes were tense, hot, and a thin glaze of fright seemed to overlay a look of desperate intent. He studied for a long minute, watching her face; then: "Don't try it, Cluckee."

"Try what?"

He shook his head. "I'm not sure. You're up to something. But whatever it is, don't! And I'm getting a band of crape for my arm. 'Death of an idea,' eh? Pretty



thought, that! So delicate. Death of the idea that anybody is to be trusted. You look like hell with buns. That was another delicate way of telling me things too, hm? Clever child."

He took his fingers from under her chin and pulled her nose. She did not move. He seemed to be taking liberties with a wide-eyed corpse that stood upright. Everhard patted her bloodless cheek, softly. "Good-by, sweet child."

"But you said you would stay with me to the end of the game," she said brokenly.

"Did I? How well you remember—some things! But you were through, all through with me. And made it plain. Anything that is tossed to the discards, Cluckee, doesn't get back into the game until there's a new deal. That's all. Good-by."

He flipped his hand carelessly and turned toward the door.

Yvette's teeth shut, edge to edge, like a sprung trap. The desperate look blazed in her eyes. Her right hand, as if there were eyes in her fingers, closed with sensitive furtiveness on the little bronze elephant and was jerked concealingly behind her.

She took two noiseless long steps. With a stiff arm swing that began below the hip and was carried up by pivotal turn of lithe body, she struck the back of his head as Everhard, noticing that she followed, was turning to look behind. An instant too late he had sensed rather than seen what was coming. As he fell, the automatic, drawn in an instinctive twinkling of movement, clattered to the floor.

Yvette screamed; then, coolly quick, replaced the elephant on the table. She hastily kicked the rug into lumpy wrinkles on the floor. She dropped to her knees, and bending over him thrust the automatic into its holster. She was holding his head with her lips almost to his forehead as

the thin-faced maid paused with panicky stare in the doorway, and a moment later a big-faced butler towered over the maid, his eyes bulging.

Yvette cried at them: "He slipped and fell. On the rug. Struck against the chair. I'm afraid he's dead. The doctor! He acted drunk, unsteady. . . . Our quarrel hurt him so! Oh, what fools we were—you, all of us!—to think he bought those jewels!"



## *Chapter Nineteen*

### 1

EVERHARD opened his eyes, not stirring. He saw a big-faced man reading a newspaper in a chair. The paper rustled. Everhard closed his eyes. His head was bandaged, and it ached. He felt wretchedly drowsy and dull. There was a stinging pain inside his left arm, above the elbow, as if from the bite of an impossibly big mosquito.

The big-faced man read by daylight through the curtains. Everhard was in a gauzy silken room, a woman's bedroom. He thought things over—or tried to—and groping carefully felt of the pajamas he wore. Satin. Everhard made a wry face; he hated silk on anybody but women.

Then he groaned, moved, stared blankly, looking confused. The newspaper rustled to the floor and the big-faced man stood up solicitously.

"How does monsieur feel?"

"Like hell."

"Monsieur had a very severe fall."

"I thought it was the ceiling that fell. Whose bedroom?"

"Mademoiselle Colbert's, monsieur."

"Tell her to come here."

"Ah, but she is out," the man said with a queer inflection.

Everhard studied the tone and face, but could make nothing of it; then: "Bring my clothes. I'll leave a note, thanking her."

"The doctor says monsieur is not to stir."

"And gave me a shot of dope to make sure I wouldn't, eh?" Everhard rubbed his arm.

"It was feared your skull was fractured. You tripped heavily on the rug."

"Damn waxed floors, anyhow." Everhard put his hands to the bandage. He didn't intend to correct the big-faced man. "And who the devil are you?"

"The butler, monsieur. Hector."

"Am I wearing your pajamas?"

"I have that honor, monsieur."

Everhard grunted, closed his eyes, meditating. The butler owned silk pajamas. Yvette had said she was surrounded by spies. Everhard felt miserable and dissatisfied with himself over the scene he had made with Yvette. Without opening his eyes: "Biradou know I'm here?"

"No no, monsieur!"

Everhard said to himself, "You're a liar," but aloud, "What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock, monsieur."

"Do you know how to make American coffee?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

"Have the cook make some. About two quarts. See that she makes it right, please. And if that's this morning's paper . . ."

Everhard put out his hand. The big-faced Hector pressed a button on the wall, then began to fold the paper neatly. Handing it to Everhard, he arranged the pillows for sitting up. "Is there anything else monsieur would like?"

"Yes." Everhard thumped the creases out of the paper with back flips of his hand. "To be left alone."

"That cannot be permitted, monsieur," said Hector, apologetically.

The door opened and the skinny maid came in. She had hot evil eyes, but smiled sweetly, greeting Everhard with respectful cheeriness. The butler went out, and she began daintily to pull the covers and pat the pillows.

"I'm all right. Just sit down where I can look at you. I need a pretty girl's smiles this morning."



She sat down, trying to be demure, and watched him.

He peered at the paper, his eyes naturally going to the first headlines. He did not move, gave no start, but just looked, though it was a moment or two before his eyes would clearly focus on the small type, and so read that Nick Dodalus, the multimillionaire tobacco merchant, had been mysteriously murdered last night at his apartment, in the midst of a birthday party.

Dodalus had been called from the table and entered a room, evidently locking the door behind him. A moment later two shots were heard. Guests and servants crashed through the door. His valet crouched beside Dodalus and heard the last agonized whisper. It was thought that he had named the murderer, but the police had taken the valet away and refused to disclose the dead man's last words.

Everhard felt that he ought to say something. "Terrible thing! I knew Dodalus well."

"And monsieur owed him money, which now he will not have to pay," said the girl. She had a sly smile, wickedly approving of Everhard's good luck.

Everhard felt like shuddering, but didn't. He thought *La Tête de Mort* must have the devil's gift for picking slimy, cold, cruel people.

He presently read the account of the de Rossi robbery. De Rossi claimed to have lost about five million francs' worth of gems, listing unset emeralds and rubies.

"What d'you know about that!" he said.

The girl leaned forward eagerly. For some reason she was very anxious to be pleasing to Everhard.

"No doubt this de Rossi has been an honest man—or at least careful. That's all the honesty of most people amounts to."

She nodded approvingly.

"An honest man all his life," Everhard went on. "But this was his one big chance. Five million! The insurance companies are out of luck. And you, angel-face, have probably

noticed that the full amount of the loss is *never* recovered in any gem robbery? The reason being that jewelers claim a bigger loss than they had. Nice honest world. Here they make me out a bigger thief than I am."

"Monsieur is so amusing!" she said, delighted.

"I feel better." He tapped the paper. "Here it is, all about how Biradou actually talked with me and de Rossi while I was in the act of kidnapping him. That'll make the old boy's dyed whiskers turn gray. De Rossi explains that he knew I would shoot. What is your name, mademoiselle?"

"Thala, monsieur."

"Never have anything to do with honest men, Thala. You can't trust 'em. Besides, fellows like Hector and me are much nicer, aren't we?"

"Oh monsieur," she exclaimed with slight uneasiness, conscious of the many microphones in the apartment, "what do you know of Hector?"

"My dear, I know it is ten o'clock in the morning and that neither *you* nor Hector has called the police."

Thala laughed, a little taken back; then, approvingly: "No wonder you are lucky, monsieur. You are so clever."

"Why doesn't Biradou know I am here, Thala?"

"Ah," she said softly, "because last evening Mademoiselle Colbert told him you had telephoned that you were going to hide with Monsieur Kiro—" She stopped, and a startled look flashed in her eyes as if she had mentioned something she shouldn't have known.

He, looking at the paper, pretended not to notice. He laid the paper aside, and coaxingly: "Thala, tell me, please. Do you think Mademoiselle Colbert loves me?"

The maid eyed him very seriously and did not reply.

"Come, Thala. The truth, if you please."

"Monsieur, she does not," she said firmly.

"I've thought that, too," Everhard agreed.

Thala leaned far forward, staringly intent, and whis-



pered hurriedly, "And it were best for you, monsieur, to hate her."

"Ah! So? Why?"

She shook her head quickly and sat back in the chair, looking mysterious but earnest.

"I see," said Everhard, who did not at all see. "She loves Monsieur Biradou?"

"As to that I cannot say." Thala seemed fairly honest in her statements. "It is known that he loves her, and so she must not let him think he is not loved. He has great influence, that Biradou."

"She framed me to give him the credit for catching me, didn't she?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then why hasn't he been given the honor of arresting me before this?"

She arose quickly, made reckless by a sudden impulse, and, catching at Everhard's hand, bent low, whispering hurriedly: "Monsieur will soon learn that he has friends even she must obey. Friends more powerful than even Monsieur Biradou. And monsieur, please, when you become a great man—please, you will remember that Thala and Hector are to be trusted?"

Her evilly passionate eyes begged and promised; her thin lips were parted in readiness to tell more, but she swung her head alertly and pulled away, gave a light jump, two quick steps, and calmly opened the door for Hector, who came with a tray. Hector, not unkindly but firmly, sent her from the room.

"You are a lucky man, Hector. She loves you. I guessed it, and she blushes so prettily."

"She had better love me, monsieur," said Hector, coolly, as he put the tray on a bed-table and lifted it. "I will kill her if she tries any woman's trick on me."

## 2

Thala, without knocking, opened the bedroom door. Her eyes glittered with excitement. Then a little old withered, pale-yellow man peered like an expectant vulture through the door.

Balzar's cat-like eyes looked up into Hector's face and silently the old man held out a skinny hand, showing a ring and its portrait. Hector stiffened like a soldier and bowed, then left the room, pushing the excited Thala before him.

Balzar looked at Everhard and his thin mouth moved in a slow writhing smile. He bowed in exaggerated courtesy, keeping his yellow eyes level, then sat down close by the bed. He peered unwinkingly as he said softly, "I am sorry to learn that monsieur has met with an accident."

"Oh, yes indeed you are!" said Everhard, sarcastic but not unfriendly. "Hovenden's million is taken from my pocket and restored to him. All the jewels de Rossi so kindly permitted me to carry away are lost. And I am your prisoner."

Balzar chuckled amiably, then: "But you remain fortunate, monsieur." With cautious afterthought he added, "Perhaps."

"Now what?"

Balzar lifted a nearly hairless eyebrow. "Perhaps monsieur would like to know the dying words of his friend Dodalus?"

Everhard waited, showing interest but not replying.

Balzar moistened his thin lips with a tongue's tip. "Dodalus died naming you, monsieur, as the one who killed him."

Everhard did not move. Not an eyelash stirred. Without a change of expression his eyes met the staring yellow ones. There was utter silence for a few moments, except for the small gilded clock's ticking, like the hurrying faint click-click of tiny invisible feet. Then Everhard



smiled, lifting his finger-tips to the bandage. "You are right. I am lucky."

Balzar replied imperturbably, "Yes, if the doctor, the butler, the maid are permitted to testify."

"And Mademoiselle Colbert."

Balzar smiled with negative twist of head to and fro, and the smile deepened cruelly. Then as if her name had reminded him of something, he asked, "Pardon, but did you, monsieur, visit the undertaker to view the body of one Joseph Kerman?"

"Yes."

"Ah. And . . . ?"

"Queer thing, that. I recognized him as a man I knew. But before I got even half a look at him a hand fell on my shoulder. I was taken into another room and questioned. Had rather a time getting away."

"So?" said Balzar.

"Just so."

"And the dead man was . . . ?"

"A sort of relative, by marriage."

"And a friend?" Balzar suggested.

"A business associate, at times."

Balzar meditated with lips pursed and yellow eyes peering. "Your grief was very slight. You entertained yourself by going to a circus in the evening."

"I had no reason to weep over that bird!"

"You had no idea of how he met his death?"

"He's had dealings with a lot of bad crooks. I may have been curious as to which one got him, if you call that an idea."

"Ah," Balzar murmured. "Since you had no sorrow in his death, you will perhaps have no joy in learning that he is alive."

"*Alive!*" Everhard bluffed his best.

Balzar sat as if listening to the tone of the word that still rang in his ears, and scrutinized Everhard's face doubtfully. "Yes, alive. Shortly after Monsieur Kerman's

simple funeral, yesterday afternoon, an aëroplane flying to Germany was forced down by motor trouble. Imagine the amazement of some persons to learn that the sole passenger was Monsieur Kerman, who had just been buried. In spite of certain efforts at secrecy, he is known to have reappeared in Paris late last night."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Everhard, with real feeling.

"Come, come, monsieur," Balzar coaxed impatiently. "You knew that your friend J. K. James was not dead."

"Like hell I did! I'd have poked that corpse in the ribs and asked why the Customs had just nailed a half-million dollars' worth of . . . well, never mind what. Anyhow, it nearly ruined me and another man. He wanted to save his own face, that's all. I'm sorry to hear your good news, monsieur. Damn sorry, I can tell you! That is, unless you tell me where I can find him, now."

"And you would . . ." Balzar's voice trailed off into inflectional questioning.

"You're right I would. Or any other man that hands me the double cross."

"'Man,' hm?" Balzar repeated significantly.

"As for women—hell! It's your own fault if you give them half a chance."

"You are forgiving?" Balzar suggested. His thin tone sounded disapproving.

Everhard took the cue and frowned: "Man or woman, Balzar. The double cross ought to mark the spot where the body's found."

Balzar sucked in his wrinkled cheeks, lifted his hairless eyelids with an air of slight surprise. "Monsieur is such a gallant man that I wondered." He smiled wickedly. His eyes dropped as if to meditate, but were raised at once to surprise any unguarded look on Everhard's face. Silence. Then the murmur: "You are now wanted by the police for robbery and for murder."

"For robbery," Everhard corrected.



"And murder," Balzar insisted mildly. Pause. "But if you wish, both can be taken care of, perfectly."

"Yes? How?"

"As for the Dodalus affair, monsieur, that can be very simply arranged. The maid, the butler, and the doctor. You understand?"

Everhard nodded, wondering whether he ought again to refer to Yvette. If they knew James lived, she then was dead. And evidently she had confessed nothing. He had a very wretched feeling about the way he had treated her after all his promises to see her through, come what might. He took the chance and said, "You forget Mademoiselle Colbert."

"I do not forget," said Balzar, smiling enigmatically. "But it seems difficult for you to forget one who proved unworthy of your confidence."

"Well, damn it, I loved her. You don't love women because they don't lie to you. You love them because you can't help it."

"Ah, then you still love her?"

"Yes, but I don't think that would keep me from breaking her neck."

"Ah! Ah!" Balzar sucked in his breath and the yellow eyes glowed. "Good! Good!" he said excitedly. And the tongue's tip moved over his lips again as if tasting blood, and liking it.

Everhard had no prejudice against snakes. They interested him and he could handle them. But there was something about Balzar that made Everhard want to step on him, and grind his heel as one grinds a snake's head in the dust. He said, "Since I had nothing to do with killing Dodalus, I can understand how that can be straightened out. But the de Rossi affair?"

"Ah." Balzar grinned. "Since you are so lucky . . ." He seemed to feel that luck was a definite characteristic, blessing some men. "The de Rossi affair is more difficult. But possibly Monsieur de Rossi can be persuaded to ex-

plain to the police that he misunderstood the directness of American business methods, eh? And if he refuses to prosecute, what then?" Balzar spread his hands and hunched his thin shoulders.

"And in return for these slight favors of unknown friends, I shall be expected to do just what?"

"To obey orders." Balzar spoke with sudden sternness.

"I am more used to giving them," said Everhard with equal sternness.

Balzar was evidently used to taking them from men who had the gift of command, for he shrank at once into a kind of Oriental humbleness, bowing, and murmured, "And shall continue to give them if you prove worthy."

"Fair enough. For a man that has no choice. But how soon is it to be known whether or not I am worthy?"

Balzar's thin mouth twisted in a smile, his bald head bobbed slowly up and down. Softly: "By midnight, monsieur." The scrawny neck stiffened. The eyes were as steady as yellow upholstery tacks. "Monsieur, few men have been so fortunate as you. In spite of much that touches the suspicions of unknown friends, they nevertheless are willing to trust you implicitly—implicitly, monsieur. Provided you pass through a slight initiation without in the least flinching. It is a mere nothing, if you are worthy of our trust. No man before, never before you, monsieur, has been so honored. For then you will at once become—" Balzar paused dramatically, and his thin voice had the soft rasping sound of a sword slowly drawn from a metal sheath—"equal even with *me* in the confidence of La Tête de Mort!"

3

For ten minutes after Balzar had gone, backing out with humble bows as if even then in the presence of one not merely his equal but a superior, Everhard, not moving, stared at the door.



It had come, the thing for which he had traveled all the way to Pairs; but somehow he was almost uninterested. Take the risk and go through with it—yes, he would do that; but “Damn aëroplanes!” he said angrily to himself. Not even Yvette could explain that one away.

He put his hands to the bandage, thinking of her, not of the headache.

It all seemed very clear to him now. “God bless her, she wanted Biradou to nail me—then I’d have been safe in jail. The Death’s-Headers would have got me out, somehow. She knew what she was doing. And—hell!—after I had made Biradou himself think I was buying diamonds, naturally little Cluckee couldn’t guess the truth.”

His fingers closed on the sheet as if grasping something he wanted to choke. “You were jealous,” he told himself. “That’s all that was the matter with you. Jealous of Biradou. That’s why you wouldn’t forgive her, God damn you! You might have been on the job and started something when they came in here to ask her about James. Why the hell did he want to come back to Paris? And she tried to warn you not to go near Dodalus. But you were in no mood to believe a mere hasty whisper. Thought she wanted you to stay near her so she could coax some more and be forgiven.”

The door opened slowly. Thala with timid eagerness looked in. Her lustful eyes burned with something like awe and the cruel slit of a mouth was parted breathlessly. “Is there anything that can be brought to monsieur?”

Everhard scrutinized her face with a steadiness that made her whipcord body shrink slightly; but he spoke gently: “Too bad, Thala, you didn’t listen at the door. You could believe me when I tell you the good news.”

She hesitated, then nodded confessionally.

“Good!” he said. “Sit down here.” He put out a hand. She came readily. “Where’s Hector?”

“Hector has gone to the street to look about because

it is believed that the house is watched," she murmured. "We are very uneasy lest the police think you are here."

"Then we are alone, Thala?"

"Oh no. Two men wait in the front. They have been sent to wait."

"So you heard everything?" His voice was encouraging.

She whispered, "Yes, monsieur. . . . But oh, monsieur, please speak low. We may be overheard."

"And do you think I am likely to fail in the little initiation to-night?"

"Not you, monsieur!"

"And after that," Everhard lowered his voice, mindful of microphones, "those whom I choose to trust may have diamonds . . . servants . . . such an apartment as this . . . such fame as Jeanne Colbert had when she pretended to be Isobel de Nevers. You could show her how the part really ought to have been played—no?"

Thala muttered vicious names for that traitoress Jeanne Colbert.

"Did they kill her here, Thala?"

"No, monsieur. Not here."

"And I shall like to trust you, Thala. You will never be false, will you?"

The girl's face brightened. She whispered, "Monsieur is kind."

"To some people." Everhard folded her fingers into a fist. He held the fist in his hand. "Thala, you heard Monsieur Balzar say that I am lucky?"

She nodded. "Oh yes!"

"Well, I'll tell *you*." He was whispering now. "That's mostly due to a little charm I carry. At least, I always have some bad luck when I haven't the charm on me. And we want to be lucky to-night, don't we?"

"Oh, yes indeed, monsieur!"

"Then bring my gun, will you, Thala?"

"No no, monsieur!"

"I see. You want me to remember that you are one I



can trust, but you will do nothing to give me reason to remember."

"But monsieur, if they knew, they would kill me, and you, too!" she hissed.

"No one will know, Thala. And what harm can come to those who are lucky?"

"But a gun will do you no good, monsieur. And why do you want it when you are to be among friends? And if you tried to use it they would know you cannot be trusted. No no no, monsieur, please!"

"Silly child. I am asking for a charm that has never failed me. And to-night of all nights, if I don't have good luck . . . Hector is already jealous of you, Thala. Did you show him that ring I gave you?"

She dropped her head shyly, shaking it.

"Good! You are willing to keep the ring without telling him. We understood each other at a glance, did we not, Thala? So go bring the gun, and the extra clip." He pushed encouragingly.

Thala's skinny snake-like arm curved about his neck and her hot eyes were close to his face. Then: "Yes, monsieur!" and she ran from the room on noiseless tiptoe.

4

After the visit of Monsieur Balzar it appeared all right for Everhard to be left alone, unwatched. And it was seven o'clock when Hector came in humbly with a roll of bandages, towels, soap, brush, and razor. He turned on more light and moved a chair, placed a hassock.

Before throwing back the covers Everhard, with shove of foot, carefully pushed farther down in the bed something that lay by his side. The pajamas were short in the legs, big around the belly, too tight across the shoulders.

"Remember, Hector, no damn perfume."

Everhard sat in the chair. Hector removed the bandage and pad. The hair had been shaved away from the jagged cut.

"Monsieur struck the edge of a chair in falling. The doctor took many stitches." Hector carefully, delicately, placed a fresh pad over the jagged cut, and bound it neatly with a smaller bandage.

"You do it nicely, Hector. Where did you learn?"

"I was in a hospital, monsieur. But a doctor . . . I taught him to tell lies about me! . . . and a certain other person, who believed them. After that the unknown friends gave me help."

Everhard meditated a moment, then: "Was she pretty, the nurse the doctor lied to?"

"Yes, monsieur." Hector showed no emotion at all. "I was almost sorry after I stabbed her. . . . Now just lie back, monsieur."

Everhard lay back on the cushion that Hector adjusted for a head-rest. He lathered Everhard's face, rubbed with fingers, picked up the razor, stropped it, put light fingers to Everhard's forehead and drew the razor deftly down the cheek.

"Monsieur is a very fortunate man," said Hector, scraping daintily about the Adam's apple.

"Yes," Everhard agreed, with lift of glance toward the big bland face, studded with two cold eyes. "I think so too."

"I trust that monsieur will not forget that I am a man to be depended on at all times."

"I shall remember, Hector."

After finishing the shaving, Hector began to straighten the bedclothes, but Everhard touched his arm. "Just fluff up the pillows a little. I'll lie down again." He got into bed and drew the covers firmly about him.

Hector brought in Everhard's clothes. The suit had been pressed. There was fresh linen. The shoes were shined. But the pockets had been emptied of everything except handkerchiefs. Everhard thought finding those extra passports would do something to help them believe that he was quite the proper sort of man for the Death's Head.



## 5

In the entrance hall, Hector helped Everhard into his overcoat and gave him a cap.

"My own, monsieur. The hat will not sit well over the bandage."

Thala, her eager eyes burning with the sort of blaze that consumes men, turning them to ashes and dust, stood before him, offering his stick.

Two taciturn men in thick overcoats with velvet collars, hat in hand, were at the door, one with his hand on the knob.

"To-night you will be still lucky, monsieur!" Thala whispered, tense, not furtively. "And play for high stakes!"

"Yes, for high stakes, Thala," he said with a steady look.

The door opened. The two escorts stepped aside for Everhard to pass out first. They bowed slightly as he passed. They seemed to feel that they were in the presence of one who would soon have the power of life and death over them.

No one spoke in the elevator. As soon as they left the elevator, a man opened the street door, beckoning.

They moved quickly along the sidewalk to a taxi. Only one man got in with Everhard, and he kept looking back through the window.

"The cursed police agents," he said bitterly, "have been in this neighborhood all day. They drive taxis. They sell flowers. They sweep the streets. Our friends watch now to see if we are followed."

Everhard said nothing. The man peering backward through the window chuckled without humor and said confidently, "They will be so tangled they cannot follow their own noses."

The taxi cut from the Champs-Élysées into a dark street and dove a zigzag course, taking corners sharply. From

time to time another taxi appeared far behind, frequently turning its headlights off and on with winking quickness.

After some twenty minutes the first taxi drew up at the curb, waiting; and the second stopped near by. The men got out and talked together.

"We have given them the slip!"

"One cannot be too sure," a voice insisted. "The police are devils for hanging on."

"But here we are, and no one has come."

Everhard's companion looked at his watch by the flame of a cigarette-lighter. "The appointment must be kept."

He reëntered the taxi. The fellow continued to stare out through the rear window. "One does not dare make mistakes," he explained.

The taxi stopped near the Palais-Royal, and the man pointed to the entrance of a subterranean café. "You are to go there, monsieur, and wait."

Everhard gave a look at the gloomy neighborhood and got out.

"Good-by, monsieur," said his companion, respectfully.

"You aren't coming?"

"Another meets you here, monsieur."

Everhard had scarcely seated himself before a fellow came up insolently. It was evident that he did not know anything about the honor that was likely to be conferred soon upon Everhard. This fellow had the pinched look of a street rat that has found good clothes, some money, and at once attempts to pass among his betters for an equal.

"Monsieur will come with me," he said, half sneering.

"Why should I?" Everhard demanded.

The fellow hitched his trousers, swayed his shoulders, grinned impudently, and drew from his pocket a small box wrapped in paper. With discourteous gesture he threw it on the table.



"What is that?" Everhard asked, pointing with a forefinger.

"Open it and see," said the fellow with wry twist of mouth.

Everhard drew his hands back to the edge of the table. "Open it yourself if it's something you want me to see."

The fellow gave him a quick look, then sullenly opened the little box.

"There," he said, holding it out. "Perhaps now you will know better than to give yourself fine airs!"

Everhard took the little box, glanced at the tiny miniature of Kurlingen, put it into his pocket, and stood up.

The man led the way sullenly. They walked together; walked for blocks, and at last were again near the arcade of the Palais-Royal. Undoubtedly they had gone over a plotted course where watchers lurked at corners and in doorways, waiting to see who followed.

Three times the sullen fellow struck matches before he lit his cigarette; then a shadow detached itself from a black wall and came near. The shadow and the sullen fellow spoke hurriedly in clipped argot. Then the sullen fellow hurried off with slinking sway of body.

"Come, monsieur," said the new guide hoarsely. He spoke pleasantly enough but with matter-of-fact impatience.

They walked to a taxi that waited near by. The taxi started up as soon as they got in, without directions being given. The man drew a handkerchief from his pocket and said brusquely, "Pardon, but I must tie this about your eyes."

"Pardon, but you'll do nothing of the kind," said Everhard.

"It is required."

"You can go to the devil. I will not be tied. Neither hands, feet, nor eyes."

"You do not obey, monsieur!"

"Not that!"

"You do not trust me when you know I have been sent by those you must obey?"

"Trust you? Yes, in that I will go with you, anywhere—but with my eyes open."

"You make it difficult, monsieur."

"I'll make it more difficult if you try that."

The fellow held the handkerchief in his hands with elbows on knees and meditated a long time; then he said: "You are a brave man, monsieur. I have heard the teeth of other men chatter as if they were chewing almond hulls. No one before has ever refused the handkerchief, and that requires courage. You will make a comrade that one can trust. I am no fool, monsieur. There is always one way to tell the spy. He is so ready to seem a good fellow. But please, monsieur, you will never tell any one that I did not blindfold you?"

"Never."

The taxicab took a long, roundabout way. Everhard knew because, after a time, he recognized that they were crossing the Île de la Cité; and presently he could feel cobblestones under the wheels, the lug of the engine against the up-grade. After more turnings and a bumpy skitter as the wheels rolled down-grade, the taxi stopped suddenly.

Everhard heard the hushed call of a voice. The driver answered, perhaps giving a password. There was the grating squeak as when heavy doors are opened. The taxi moved forward for a little way, entering a cobbled courtyard. There was again the grating squeak, then the heavy thud of doors closing.

"Come," said Everhard's companion. "We are here." He got out first, and held the big blue handkerchief as if he had just taken it off Everhard's eyes.

Everhard stepped out. It was very cold, with a mist of wet air dampening the stones. The driver had dimmed the lights. Two fellows in workmen's smocks lurched up,



and turned a flash-light into Everhard's face. One said rather grumblingly: "He has the rogue's look, this fellow. So much the better for him!"

The one who had been Everhard's companion in the taxi said, "Here I leave you, monsieur." To the others: "This one is different." To Everhard again: "You will have good luck, all right. Here is my hand to wish it."

Everhard put out his right hand. Shaking hands with a man is one way to murder him without much of a struggle. The fellow held to Everhard's hand with a tight grip for longer than seemed friendly; but Everhard misjudged him, for dropping the hand, the man turned almost proudly to his companions: "Ha! His fingers are warm and do not tremble! And it is cold, this night."

Then this man, who knew how to tell police spies because they were always so eager to seem good fellows, patted Everhard on the shoulder. "You are a man for my money, monsieur!"

One of the men in smocks, carrying a flash-light, led the way into the house, an old house as revealed by the flash-light and the smell. He opened a door and pointed to some narrow steps that seemed to run straight down into utter darkness. Offering Everhard a small flash-light, not the one he was using, he said gruffly, "You go first."

"Pardon, no."

"*Pah!* You are afraid!"

"*Pah* yourself! I know a rogue when I see him, and he does not walk at my back on stairs in the dark."

The fellow swore grumblingly but went ahead, slowly, swishing his flash-light about.

They descended to a cellar walled with huge old stone. In the stone was a heavy crude door. The man tugged at it. The thing creaked as if in great pain, opening. A warm, musty smell came out of the blackness, and the faint sound of trickling water.

"From here you go alone," said the man, again offering the flash-light.

Everhard looked down through the door into the darkness. He had never been in the catacombs or sewers of Paris, nor visited the oubliettes. For one thing, his nose was sensitive; for another, he was not morbid enough to care about old torture chambers. He did know, having read, that the barbarous lords of the feudal ages had almost as much of a passion for burrowing underground as for raising towers and battlements; and had read also that the hills of the left bank of the Île de la Cité, clear to the Odéon, were honeycombed with subterranean passages, many unexplored and impassable.

"From here I go alone . . . where?" Everhard asked; and the man shook his head.

"To wherever you are going."

"Thank you. Quite explicit." Everhard bent forward. The flash-light showed that the iron ladder which led straight down was not old. "How many have gone before me?"

"Not many," said the man. "Nearly all refuse to go from here." Something in the way he said it seemed encouraging Everhard also to refuse.

"What happened then?"

The fellow shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know. They were taken away as they were brought. Where, I do not know." He again shrugged his shoulders. He did not care, either.

Everhard stepped through the door, grasped the ladder, and began to descend, still facing the man.

"*Au revoir, monsieur,*" said Everhard, with slight flip of hand. That means, as every one knows, "I shall see you again, perhaps."

"*Adieu!*" the man answered hoarsely, and with creak and jar swung the heavy door to. Dense blackness came about Everhard like a heavy cloak, and the foul smell of an old wet grave. One says "*adieu*" at the foot of the guillotine.



## *Chapter Twenty*

### 1

EVERHARD groped his way blindly down the ladder and with down-reaching foot made sure the slimy floor was solid before he let go. He found himself in a narrow passage. The floor was uneven, and oozing water trickled. The way was slippery. He followed the passage on and on, going slowly, for the footing was bad and he did not want to stumble into a mucky pool. He was glad of the small flash-light that had been given him.

He came to the foot of a narrow twisting stone stairway that wound upward in short spirals, like the stairway of a donjon—the stronghold of a feudal castle. He thought that perhaps this was indeed the ruin of what had once been a donjon, sacked in the dark ages, and half hidden hundred of years ago by the scraping down of hills, since built over many times. All the old parts of Paris have ruins of some sort for a foundation.

The upward climb seemed unending, and in the musty air sweat came to his face. The overcoat grew noticeable. He took it off, cast it behind him, and went on.

The stairs ended before a massive door. He played the flash-light over it and raised his fist to knock, but pushed instead. The door's sluggish weight gave slightly. He put a shoulder to it and the door swung noiselessly. He entered an utterly bare, unlighted, small circular room, walled and floored with stone. There was a narrow recessed door directly opposite. Everhard crossed to it. This also was heavy on its hinges and swung sluggishly, and he peered through into a large dimly lighted room. He went in, stopped, and the door of its own weight swung to, slowly, behind him.

The room was very large. Its walls were completely hung with heavy crimson draperies. They were spotted with brocaded arabesques that no doubt disguised peep-holes. The floor was laid with rugs; the furniture was massive. Electric lights shed a kind of moonlight through alabaster bowls. It was a weird place, airless, stifling, silent.

Everhard took off his cap and dropped it behind him. He wiped his hands carefully on a handkerchief and tossed the crumpled handkerchief also behind him, and looked about, studiously incurious, and not greatly impressed, for the whole thing smelt of claptrap, like the fantastic initiation into some queer secret order. What he wanted was a glimpse of *La Tête de Mort* himself.

He heard a voice from behind the curtains: the deep thick rumble of some one who spoke as a beast-like creature would. "Good!" he thought. "That sounds like what I've heard of the devil! You're going to like this show, Cluckee," he whispered to himself, feeling somehow sure the dead girl could hear and understand.

Then he heard another voice, and his heart bumped his ribs like the prod of an elbow that warned him to wake up. He would have recognized it anywhere. It was the voice of the mysterious artist who had appeared out of the darkness on the *Place du Parvis-Notre-Dame*. Everhard could not understand what was said. It seemed a language that he had never heard.

The curtains parted. A small figure appeared in a long robe, and a vulturine head on a scrawny neck bowed slightly with uplifted eyes.

Balzar said reproachfully, "You are late."

"I was handed about like a package. Blame your post-men for that."

"Ah." Balzar appeared not to know whether to be pleased or displeased by the lack of humbleness. He remained near the curtain, and in an unctuous whine mur-



mured, "You recall, monsieur, that we have previously spoken together of the woman Colbert?"

"I do. Yes."

"The woman Colbert betrayed you, monsieur."

"I know it."

"We have discovered that she was a spy, trying to betray those who are about to become your friends."

Balzar, saying that, paused as if expecting a reply. Everhard gave him one: "It would be like her."

"Yes. A few days ago we discovered reason to doubt that she had remained in the sanatorium in Switzerland where she was supposed to be ill, and we became very suspicious of her. She stubbornly claimed that she had been there, and could prove it. This was just at the time of the arrival in Paris of the gentleman who chose to use the name Joseph Kerman. We gave her the chance to establish her trustworthiness, but the man James entered into a conspiracy with her to deceive us."

"Oh, so that was it!" said Everhard, surprised.

"We now believe that the friendship we permitted her to maintain with the detective Biradou was used to convey our secrets to him, rather than to secure his aid for us."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes, monsieur. And we now also for many reasons suspect that you may have been a party to this conspiracy to destroy the great order of La Tête de Mort. You yourself, monsieur—" this in a sarcastic whine—"are a very mysterious person—"

"Rot!" said Everhard, flatly.

Balzar caught his breath. He was used to seeing men tremble; and lifting his voice angrily: "You are the friend and relative of James, our great enemy. And he is her friend, else he would not have played a dead man's rôle! You have told me yourself that you love her."

"How many men don't love the wrong kind of woman?"

"We know," Balzar shrieked, "that either you are a

conspirator with her to enter our society and learn our secrets, or else she meant to introduce you into our society, then coax the secrets from you. Which was it? An answer is demanded."

"Bah! that's a hell of a question for a man as smart as you to ask! If it were the one thing, I'd lie. If the other, I'd know nothing about it, should I? But I'll say it was neither, since she put me up to the de Rossi job to give Biradou the credit of nailing me. You figure it out. Any way you like."

Balzar was cunning, but he had never played poker. This hard-eyed man was difficult to manage. Perhaps the woman Colbert had found it out, too, and so deliberately got him into trouble.

"But," Balzar cried triumphantly, "you do feel that she betrayed you!"

"I know damn well she did."

"And monsieur," said the sinister, slithering voice, "you told me you kill those who betray. Look . . . watch there!"

Everhard turned, following the gesture.

Curtains stirred and were slowly drawn aside.

Yvette, bound, sat in a high-backed massive chair on a dais. In the make-up and costume of Isobel de Nevers, she looked like a captive queen forced against her will to keep her throne. Her hair was flaming gold, and a flame-like spray of egrets swayed above her head. Breast, hands, and throat shimmered with jewels, some of them recently out of de Rossi's vault. Glittering pendants dangled beside cheeks that were as pale as if all the blood had been drained away. Her lips were stained blood-red. Her dark eyes, shadowed with lids that were as purple as grapes, were fixed on Everhard. Her elbows were tied to the arms of the chair.

La Tête de Mort liked the theatrical. Everhard did not, and was not even startled. He was glad to know Yvette had not been killed, then at once understood that they



had brought him here to kill her and so prove to them that he would do what he had said he would do. He felt that he might do just that, since death would be kindness compared with the sort of mercy that would be shown her by such fiends.

Balzar's bald head glistened with sweat. His yellow eyes gleamed. He was excited and eager. "Go," he shouted, thrusting out a skinny arm, "to the table in the center of the room. A pistol is there. You are famed as a marksman. Take it up and kill the woman Colbert. Then all our suspicions will vanish."

Everhard, staring at Yvette, wondered how the devil he could make any sort of fight for her when these men lurked behind curtains where only chance shots would reach them. He growled, "Oh I'll kill all right!" and so sincerely he spoke that at once, approvingly, a hoarse gleeful chuckle came from behind the curtains—a thick-lipped jabber of delight.

From what he had heard about the Death's Head, Everhard thought the voice was his, and glanced in the direction of the sound. He saw nothing but the fold of heavy draperies hanging motionless, but watched so long that Balzar, eager for the crime, again cried out, urging him to be quick about it. Everhard turned toward him. The old man's yellow eyes gleamed, lustfully cruel; and the pink tongue's tip darted about the withered mouth as if licking something bitter but subtly pleasant.

"Don't worry," said Everhard. "You'll see!" and walked to the table.

A dueling pistol lay there, a costly thing inlaid with silver and gold filigree, with intricate Swiss-carved handle that fitted a man's curved hand and was balanced to a hair's weight. The precision of a watchmaker had gone into the fashioning of that gun and in a hand that did not tremble its accuracy was absolute. Everhard picked it up, fitted his finger slowly into the almost labyrinthine carving of the handle. He glanced toward where Balzar

had stood. No one was there now. A sluggish stir of the crimson curtain ceased as Everhard looked. He balanced the pistol in his hand, trying the feel of it, and seemed uncertain how best to place his fingers along the intricately carved butt. He scowled at Yvette with as vengeful a look as he could summon.

Her lips were tight, as if she would not let any weakness rise up within her and cry out; and there was no flinching in her eyes. She seemed to be trying to make him understand that there was no way to save her; no way to destroy the Death's Head except by going through with the test imposed upon him. An echo of James's words came into his memory: "Made out of iron, that family!"

Silence, just silence, with watching eyes behind the curtains. The cowardice of it made Everhard furious, but gave him a kind of assurance, too. He raised the pistol at arm's length straight above his head and held it there for a moment that must have seemed irresolute to her, for her shoulders stiffened, and pushing her breast forward she said, "Shoot, monsieur!"

His arm moved, slowly lowering the pistol at arm's length like a marksman using every care. The muzzle came down in line with her shoulder; down, on down, to where a bound arm struggled tensely to press against her side, as the girl braced herself for the shock of the bullet. He stood with eyes narrowed, aiming as if at her heart, and fired.

"*Dead as hell!*" he shouted, glowering at her as he tossed the pistol away.

A wild look of understanding flashed in Yvette's eyes. She threw up her head with a loose jerk and pitched forward against the lashings of the heavy chair, hung motionless with head dangling.

Laughter bubbled behind the curtain, hoarse, brutal, idiotic—the Death's Head sound of pleasure.

Everhard turned sharply. No one was there. There was not even the trembling of a curtain. Then Balzar's shrill



voice was lifted in praise behind the curtain, but no one appeared.

Everhard looked all about, waiting; then he started around the table toward Yvette. He knew that she could not long remain rigidly motionless in that distorted attitude with her whole weight pulling against the lashings that bound her arms to the chair.

But a voice called, "Monsieur!" and Everhard wheeled.

The hunchbacked artist of the Parvis-Notre-Dame, with delicate hand holding a curtain aside, stood behind him. He stepped into the room and walked up to Everhard. "Monsieur, you have done well."

Everhard now had a better look at him. The man's face was pale as anything that lives in darkness, fleshless, plastered over with lifeless skin, ugly and strange. The dark eyes burned in bony sockets. Dark hair flowed back from a high white forehead. A fastidious person, delicate and graceful, but not weak. The hump loomed at his back, more noticeable now than when he wore a cloak. The long graceful hands were empty.

The room, without ventilation, was oppressive, the air stale. The heavy motionless draperies were like palls soon to be thrown over the dead. The hunchback, standing close, peered intently, his head out-thrust. Everhard returned the gaze of the dark eyes steadily.

The hunchback shook his head with nervous trembling and an air of doubt. He exclaimed like one who fears he has made a mistake, "You have none of the weakness that is called mercy, but 'tis strange how you are not as I thought—now that I see you clearly."

Everhard's impatient "What the hell did you think?" was interrupted by a chuckle, hoarse and seemingly near. He glanced aside and saw what he thought was as ugly a face as the devil, with all hell to choose from, could have put together. A sluggish beast of a creature stood half revealed between the folds of the draperies. The head was set on squat round shoulders. A club-headed beast

of a man with a bull's neck, jaws thick as fists, and fat lips. A half-negroid face, with eyes no bigger than peas in sockets like black cups. One quick look, and Everhard knew that the brain in no such club-head could have schemed and directed *La Tête de Mort*.

At that moment Balzar, who had gone up to examine Yvette's death wound, cried out as if he himself were suddenly wounded; and six or seven dark-skinned little men who had suddenly appeared about him began yelping in an unknown tongue. Some, following the gesture of Balzar, clawed at Yvette, who, no longer pretending to be dead, sat upright, struggling though her arms were bound, and, with words that were indistinct in the clamor, called to Everhard, warningly. Balzar, like a screaming vulture robbed of food, from somewhere within his robes drew a knife and rushed at Everhard.

Everhard, his eyes on Balzar, jerked his automatic from its holster; and, with half turn of body and forearm across his breast, shot, saying, "Take it and like it—you like blood!" Balzar dropped face down, a hole in his forehead, and the back of his head looked like a shattered ostrich egg.

The dark-skinned little men squeaked, jabbered, stopped in frightened uncertainty. Some held small toy-like automatics and others knives; but they seemed to think themselves somehow unfairly tricked by seeing a gun, a big gun, in the hand of one whom they had thought unarmed.

The hunchback's delicate hands instantly clutched Everhard's wrist, fastening the long fingers. He shrieked strange words that were more than a call for help. Everhard swayed his arm backward and jerked, carrying the hunchback off balance, broke his hold, and instantly brought the automatic's barrel down on his head so that he dropped as if dead.

The dark-skinned little men hastily flung knives and fired wildly with their toy pistols, then, with squealing



panicky rush, dropped whatever was in their hands as they clawed at the heavy curtains, trying to get through, out of sight, clear away from the roar of Everhard's automatic.

He fired until it clicked, empty. Here and there the curtains swayed, brushed by some running unseen figure.

Everhard's left arm dangled loosely where a chance shot had cracked a bone, and blood trickled down his back from the bite of a thrown knife. He grinned, well pleased but wary, and called, "How did you like my show, Yvette?"

"*Mon dieu!*" she gasped.

In his right hand, elbow crooked, he held his gun level, waist-high, quite as if he did not know it was empty. He believed the fight was over, that nobody in that house would come back for more; and he knew that an empty gun is as good as any other to show to people who won't stand and fight it out.

He kicked at a knife, sending it over the rug toward Yvette, and followed. He kicked the knife again, bringing it near the dais. He smiled grimly. "To look at you, Cluckee, nobody would think you'd wallop a friend over the back of the head."

Her lips parted, but she could not speak.

Blood was dripping from the cuff of his left coat sleeve. The sight of it broke her muteness. "You are hurt!" She strained toward him against the cords that bound her arms.

"But what have they been doing to you, child?"

She closed her eyes. "I would tell nothing!"

"I know that damn well." Everhard gazed at her and a queer little smile came widening out on his mouth and reached about on his face until it even twitched in wrinkles at the corners of his eyes. "If I get down on *my* knees, will you forgive me, Yvette?"

"*Mon dieu!* They did not think you would shoot me. They meant then to torture us together and to the death!"

"I guessed it. Just a minute and I'll have you out of that chair." He stooped and laid the automatic on the dais at her feet and was picking up the knife as he said, "If I'd only have got the old devil himself along with Balzar—"

He meant the brute-like creature, but she, misunderstanding, cried out: "But you have killed him! The hunchback—that is the real El Kasyd! The real Head of Death!"

Everhard dropped the knife and turned. The hunchback lay out on the floor as if dead. Everhard, with left arm dangling loosely, walked out into the room and picked up one of the toy-like pistols. He went up to the body of the hunchback, suspiciously noting that this was not where it had fallen under the blow of the automatic's heavy barrel.

He stooped to watch the pale face, now blood-streaked and with a bruised welt high above the temple. He stood up and walked slowly around the body, then pushed with his foot. The body yielded laxly, but one hand lay as if deliberately doubled up, concealingly, under the back. Everhard hooked a toe under the crook of the elbow and pulled the arm. The hand came to view, empty.

Everhard put the small gun into his pocket and stooped. He tried to conceal the uselessness of his left arm. He caught the back of the hunchback's collar and dragged him across the floor to the foot of the dais, then rolled him over, face down. He looked at Yvette, jerked his head, and grinned. She nodded.

He cautiously picked up the knife he had kicked across the room and continued to watch the hunchback as he cut the heavy cord binding Yvette's right arm to the chair. When it was free, he put the hilt of the knife into her hand, dipped into his side coat pocket, took out the small pistol, and glanced at it distrustfully.

"No shock to these things. For which I'm damned thankful."



"You are badly hurt!" Yvette paused in sawing the cord binding her left arm.

"I've been caught out in the rain before. But this pack of cowards, for the first time in their lives, got messed up with a fellow who wasn't unarmed, so . . ."

"And how could you come armed?"

"Nice little girl named Thala."

"You trusted her?"

"No woman in my life—but you. That's why I've got a bandage on my head now."

"Oh, but I knew that if you went near Dodalus last night—"

"Yes, I know—now. That pleasant gentleman Balzar told me. And why did they kill poor old Nick? He never hurt anybody in his life."

"They knew he gave money to stir up people in Egypt to want Hovenden. The *real* El Kasyd was simply furious with jealousy."

"He's a madman anyhow. Who were all those little dark-skinned devils?" Everhard gestured with the small automatic, but not liking the feel of the thing nor its toy-like look, put it into his pocket and took up his own empty gun. The .45 was the more impressive weapon.

"Fellahs," said Yvette. "They speak no word of French." She rubbed at her half-numb arms. "Oh, I was never so surprised in my life as to find I was not dead when you shot at me!"

"Some other people, but damn few, have felt the same way about it. That brute, the gorilla—what's he in their scheme of things? Or don't you know?"

"Oh yes, I know. They did not care how they talked in front of me, because they were so sure I'd die to-night. I learned everything. They used his voice for La Tête de Mort's. It lent more terror. They used him to strangle people here, break their bones and do terribly worse things. But for you to-night, he would have tortured me while they looked on. They thought you would not shoot

me; then you too would have to look on!" She shook as if with ague.

"I think they've had their fill of blood. Balzar, anyhow." With jerk of head toward the hunchback and the shadow of a wink: "So this is the real El Kasyd, eh? Be quite a joke, won't it, if the new revolution puts Hovenden on the throne!"

"Oh yes, and there is a strong party that demands the last of the El Kasyds."

"And," Everhard went on, "Hovenden is big socially, has many powerful friends, is rich; so he'll squirm out of this mess in spite of all we can do. Stands a real chance of being put on the throne."

"That is true," said Yvette, staring down at the motionless hunchback.

"Of course it was Hovenden that furnished the brains for all these fellows," Everhard insisted, playing poker. "He'll make a good king."

The hunchback rolled over and sat up all in one movement. He stared past the gun Everhard leveled at his head and said humbly, "*Væ victis*, monsieur!"

Everhard, no scholar but a great reader of old histories, knew that the phrase was Latin and meant when you've had the worst of it, you have to take your medicine. "Good guess," he said approvingly.

"Monsieur, I was dead. I was in hell. But when you spoke of him, I tore away one little hour more of life and came back. He shall not longer be called the Prince El Kasyd."

"No? How are you going to stop him?"

"Ha, I will show you!" The hunchback's eyes glittered as if with fire.

"Maybe. But who is he, this Hovenden?"

"A gutter-born mongrel dog, vain of his tall body." The hunchback rose up, with slender fingers beating a rapid tattoo on his breast. "Look at me, monsieur! My own mother was put to death for bearing me—deformed. A



prince must be tall and handsome. Ha! I gave them, this stupid world, such a man! And their tongues lick his feet. You despised him, monsieur. Admiring you for that was my weakness. A mistake. That, and thinking you knew what art should be. I thought yours a kindred soul to mine."

Everhard grunted. "What of Hovenden?"

"A natural impostor, he aped gentlemen. I gave him the training of a gentleman, built up the imposture so it could not be disproved in newspapers or by police. And queens have dined with him." The hunchback laughed with a kind of pain, very much as if he howled. "He, a nameless dog, sentenced to death years ago for strangling an old bejeweled woman here in Paris—selling her rings to buy such clothes as gentlemen wear!"

"Did he know you were the real El Kasyd?" Yvette asked.

"Know? Know? That dog knows nothing. A puppet, he did as bidden. And told what he did to the stone wall of his room. He believed, the fool, that the devil heard him and protected him."

"Not far wrong, seems like, at that," said Everhard.

"Come, monsieur, come with me. He is in his room near by, and will never leave alive. Come, I will show you."

"Be nice to go with you and get our necks broken on the way, eh?"

"But my promise . . . my oath . . ."

"Pah!" said Everhard. "But one thing you can do. Tell me, how the hell—you *are* a genius!—did you get mixed up in a mess like this?"

The hunchback looked at him with burning eyes; hate stared out of them, and tiny white bubbles of froth were on his lips as he shrieked, "You flatter me still!" He felt himself betrayed. "You called me a genius. Admired my art. Bah! And would flatter now, still."

"Call it flattery, do you, to ask why you have lived with a lot of blood-licking rats? And gave a lousy im-

postor your name? You are a genius. You know it. You are also a damn fool. I think by now you're beginning to know that, too."

The hunchback's head went back as if the words were blows.

"Monsieur—" he was almost pleading—"I was born hating the world. Old Fered, the curse of a father, died thinking I had been smothered when still in swaddling-clothes. I grew up, hidden away, like a deformed monster that would terrify the world if it caught sight of me. I did love art, and hated all men. A monster? I would then be a monster such as none had ever seen—La Tête de Mort! With these eyes I could look through all men's garments and see the nakedness of soul. Selfish, cruel, evil—all men. And cowards. If they do not believe in what they call God, then they are afraid of the law and its punishments. And they call that fear *honor*. Pah! If they do believe in their God, they lie to Him in prayers and beg Him to give them great rewards in heaven because they are afraid of His punishment. And they call that *religion*."

"Well," said Everhard, seeing stark lunacy in the hunchback's face, "I'm afraid you've never met any really nice people. Couldn't . . . no more than a bedbug can. But there's more than that behind all this. What were you up to? What did you hope to get in the end?"

"Monsieur," said the hunchback with dignity, "I was cheated out of my right to the throne of Egypt. But I created a kingdom of my own. I drew my warriors and subjects from cowardly and evil men—the most numerous class on earth. In a few more years I would have ruled France, Europe, America. There is no law but fear, and all men bow to those whom they fear."

"Bunk!" said Everhard. "Here's one, and a girl at that, who didn't bow. She made a fool out of you and had you scared stiff."

Yvette uneasily put an imploring hand on Everhard's shoulder, but he shook off her hand.



"Listen, El Kasyd. The information comes too late to do you any good, but it's something you ought to know. All crooks are fools; that's why they're crooks. You had a new wrinkle in the crime game, but what does it amount to now? You're all through."

The hunchback glared in a daze, half stupefied by the sort of words and tone he had never before heard. He held his hands wrist to wrist, as if fingering something hidden in a sleeve.

"All right," said Everhard. "If you want to take us to Hovenden, lead the way. I'll chance it. But one tricky move, and you are dead. Then Hovenden will be king of Egypt."

At that the hunchback's right hand dropped from his sleeve.

"Come," he cried. "Come, I will show you a secret no one could learn for himself."

"Take his arm, Yvette. Hold tight so he can't even try to dodge away. And I'll have this gun at his back. Next time, I'll break his skull wide open."

They passed near Balzar's body. "Wait a minute," said Everhard, and poked his toe against one of Balzar's feet. "Just who was he?"

"My only friend, monsieur."

"And a bad one for any man to have."

"He hid me away, a babe. Kept the secret all these years and—"

"And taught you a lot of wrong things about life and the world."

"He even kept me here, as his nephew, before my own cursed father's eyes. For forty years he had lived within these walls and scarcely saw the sun. He served my father well."

"Yes. Served up puddings made out of women's bruised flesh and men's broken bones. I understand, perfectly. You like such fare too, don't you?"

"Oh please!" Yvette begged, shivering.

They went on, pushed through the heavy draperies that were suspended some four feet from the wall. The walls behind these curtains were of bare stone.

They squeezed, all three together, with Yvette's hand firmly on El Kasyd's arm, through an arched door and entered a narrow corridor. It was laid with rug runners. These walls also were of bare stone. The way was dimly lighted with dusty bulbs attached to visible wiring.

"Don't want to embarrass you, Yvette, but your wig's crooked, dress is all mussed up, some of your egret feathers got broken when we squeezed through the curtains; but at that, you look nicer than with buns."

Yvette said imploringly, "Monsieur, you are impossible!" Her tone was half admiring. She laughed nervously, in spite of herself. "No one will ever believe when I tell them of you."

## 2

El Kasyd warned them to make no sound but to listen carefully when they passed through a noiseless door and entered a queer little dimly lighted room, heavily carpeted, with two big padded chairs facing one side of the bare stone wall. There were odd small holes in the stone.

A long heavy bar of iron stood against the wall; and a great ball of hammered iron encircled the bar some three feet above the floor. The great weight of it was plainly designed to give the bar more leverage in the curious contrivance of iron rods, thick as a man's arm, and massive hinges half as wide as a man's breast, that were let into the wall.

Everhard, keeping his eyes on the hunchback's face, stooped with an ear close to one of the cone-shaped holes in the stone. He distinctly heard footsteps pacing to and fro, although the person on the other side of the wall trod a carpeted floor.

"Hovenden," El Kasyd breathed almost soundlessly and



pointed toward the lever: "This opens an ancient door."

Everhard nodded permission. El Kasyd rose to his tip-toes and carefully reached high, taking hold of the lever's handle. He moved as if the slightest sound could be heard in the next room as well as from it. He gripped the handle and swayed back, swinging himself off the floor, pressing the wall with his feet.

There was a grating shift of what looked like solid rock. For a moment Everhard thought the desperate hunchback had trapped them so that all would be killed together. Yvette gasped. With the shrill rasp of old metal joints and the creak and snap of splintered wood, the ancient doorway opened outward on its ponderous hinges. Once started, it swung of its own weight, crashing with a jar like that of an earthquake through the paneling and stucco of the next room.

The unseen Hovenden shouted in amazed terror, "My God, what's that!"

The answer came in fury from El Kasyd: "*La Mort!*"

He leaped as if escaping through the doorway, jumping two feet down to the floor of the next room where Hovenden had been nervously pacing about.

Hovenden's face turned a sickly color. He staggered back, terror-struck, with his padded red-silk robe swaying about him, and cried out in an inarticulate plea as El Kasyd, without another word, whipped the concealed knife from the sleeve of his left arm and drove it hilt deep into the tall man's breast. Hovenden reeled sidewise with a curiously silly look of astonishment, then threw his head back as if about to shout. But he was silent. He groped at the air, then dropped, squirmed and lay still, face up, the knife in his breast.

"Monsieur," El Kasyd turned, looked up at Everhard. "Justice has been done."

"Partly, yes. To finish it off right, now cut your own throat."

"You do wrong to reproach me!" El Kasyd shouted. "An artist may destroy his own work. And think, monsieur: I chose to kill *him* when I might have killed you."

"Damned wise choice. I have a gun. He hadn't. That makes a lot of difference. Now sit down and stay put or you'll be treading his heels on the road to hell. . . . Yvette, what the devil are you up to?"

She was running about the room, searching and moving objects. "I look for the telephone!"

"You will give me to the police?" El Kasyd cried and sounded outraged, as if this, even at such a time, were an unexpected insult.

"Sit down." If Everhard's gun had been filled with a fresh clip he could not have held it with more menace, and the hunchback backed into a chair, helplessly.

He clenched the arms of the chair with long fingers, shifting uneasily. His glittering eyes fell on the hilt of the knife, upright in Hovenden's breast, then his glance darted toward Everhard's face.

"Go ahead. Try it," said Everhard encouragingly, leaning against a table to hide the weakness that came from loss of blood.

Yvette had found the telephone. She talked rapidly, for the moment merely an excited Parisienne, gesturing, her voice vibrant with inflections. Everhard could not imagine how she expected any one to understand that whirling speed of words.

He glanced about the room. Hovenden, who had once murdered a foolish old woman to help his credit at the tailor's, had a four-poster bed with a velvet canopy as big as a tent. It was so high off the floor that velvet-covered steps were needed to help him climb into it. Nymphs, unclothed and of plaster, looked down from a ceiling of gold-leaf. Hovenden had evidently messed up a lot of impressions from various museums into his ideas of what furnishings and decorations were suitable for a prince. The chandeliers were of twinkling crystal, but some of



the wall lights were modernistic—angular and opaque. A full-length mirror, bound with a curved frame of ebony and ivory, stood ready to greet him flatteringly. The furniture was either genuinely old or ingeniously antiqued, but ornate.

The lower part of the walls had been paneled with carved wood; and in opening the ancient door the hunchback had shattered and broken the paneling. Above the paneling was a frieze, mostly of gargoyle faces with mouths agape. Some were cut at an angle that showed no more depth than the others, but led into the listening gallery where El Kasyd and Balzar, no doubt mostly Balzar, eavesdropped.

Yvette approached Everhard. She looked very happy, almost a little drunk. Her wig was askew, the egret plumes were broken and frayed as if wilted. Some of the jewels had broken loose and fallen, unregarded.

"Very soon now," she said, nodding. "Please let me fix a sling for your arm."

"Whom did you talk to?"

"Monsieur Biradou."

"You would, wouldn't you? With all Paris to choose from!" Everhard smiled, trying to be pleasant. "Whatever happens, Monsieur Biradou must have the credit?"

She answered with spirit, her dark eyes growing brighter. "He has always trusted me, implicitly. Even as you," she smiled, "promised."

"Wait till he gets a whack over the head, from behind."

"Oh you are unfair! I could hate you easily! The telephone in this house has been tapped and some one listens night and day. The one who listened to-night, because of great anxiety for me, *and for you*, was Monsieur Biradou. He recognized my voice at once and spoke to me. And they come at once, the police."

"But the splendor of Isobel de Nevers—" Everhard glanced from her feet to the broken egrets—"is not now

quite what he has been accustomed to admire, in spite of all my diamonds that you are wearing. Wash your face, Yvette, and I'll bet he wouldn't know you."

Yvette laughed, glancing aside. The laughter was wiped away. She stared in terror, reeled back, and screamed. Everhard instinctively threw up the automatic and pulled the trigger, forgetting that it was empty. He slammed the heavy gun straight across the room, striking the face of the brute-like creature that loomed in the freshly opened doorway. Then he reached quickly into his pocket for the small automatic that he had picked from the floor, at the same time calling to Yvette: "Get out, run! Go! Out of the room!"

The beast of a man was massive and now crazed with pain. The pea-like eyes in their deep sockets seemed little balls of greenish fire. There was a reddish slaver on the mouth, and blood dropped from the face where a chance bullet, during the shooting in the curtained room, had smashed the jaw.

The instant Everhard's thrown gun struck him, the creature leaped into the room with great thick arms pushing out claw-like hands.

El Kasyd, seeing Everhard discard the empty gun, yelped mockingly as he sprang from the chair and called quick commanding words at the enraged idiot beast. But the creature, mad with pain, was past heeding anybody's words. A huge claw of a hand closed on the hunchback's shoulder, jerking him off his feet, dangling him. El Kasyd squealed, beat frantically; but the brute, trained to torture and break bodies, ran his fingers into El Kasyd's long hair, raised him by it and a thigh and drove the back of the hunchback's neck down against an uplifted knee, then flung the body aside and came lumbering at Everhard.

Everhard, distrustful of the small cheap automatic, stood fast with the half-raised gun held like a boxer's fist. He knew there was no shock to these small bullets. If the shot failed to kill instantly he, too, would have his neck broken



like that of El Kasyd's. Yvette screamed as the brute reached out; but Everhard, with a boxer's quickness, drove the muzzle of the automatic squarely into an eye socket, pulled the trigger, and jumped back. In jumping he struck against Yvette, who held a three-foot marble statue of a dancing-girl high over her head, ready to bring it down on the beast-thing's skull. The heavy statue fell from her unnerved hands and was broken into many pieces as the creature lurched forward, dropped, and lay still.

Everhard looked at her, then at the broken statue. "Great girl. But listen, child." He held out the toy-like automatic. "Just suppose there hadn't been another shell in this thing?"

"Oh!"

"We bluffed El Kasyd for the last half-hour with an empty gun. That was easy. But this damn gorilla—he wouldn't be bluffed."

The unbolted door swept open. Men rushed through, some in uniform, others not. Biradou was first. Close behind him came the bulky James, with eyes hard-set and anxious.

Biradou swept the yielding Yvette into his arms and held her tightly as he looked about in quick searching glances.

James closed on Everhard, saw the bandage on his head, the broken arm, the knife-slashed clothing, the soggy blood-stains and the blood-drained paleness of his face. "My God, Don! A clean sweep as usual, but you are hurt!"

Everhard's glance passed James's anxious eyes, looked at Biradou with Yvette clinging to his neck.

"Marvelous, these detectives. Can't hide a thing from 'em." Everhard grinned at him, then pushed out with friendly shove. "One side, Jimmy. Stand back and listen. She's just coaxed Biradou to forgive me for bluffing him out of the de Rossi diamonds. Here they come."

Yvette came with head up, just as if the plume of egrets

was not broken, her wig not crooked, her dress not torn and dirty. Caressingly she held the arm of Monsieur Biradou, and she looked more brightly drunken than ever.

Biradou was trim, erect, quick of movement, with square-cut black beard before him like a proud insignia of rank. His keen eyes were not now clicking in rapid glances about the room. They were fixed on Everhard's face.

Yvette reached out, forcibly pulled at Everhard's lax arm, pushed his hand into Biradou's outreaching fingers and said: "Don, dear! Monsieur Biradou—my father!"

Everhard blinked. The look on his face was quite as if he had never in his life played poker. Yvette was silently laughing at him.

"I'll be damned!" he said almost humbly.



## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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- Adventures of Jimmie Dale. Frank L. Packard.  
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. A. Conan Doyle.  
Adventures of the D. C. I. Major C. E. Russell.  
Affair in Duplex 9B, The. William Johnston.  
Affair at the Chateau, The. Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.  
Affinities and Other Stories. Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
After House, The. Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
After Noon. Susan Ertz.  
Ah, the Delicate Passion. Elizabeth Hall Yates.  
Ailsa Page. Robert W. Chambers.  
Alcatraz. Max Brand.  
All at Sea. Carolyn Wells.  
All the Way by Water. Elizabeth Stancy Payne.  
Altar of Friendship, The. Blanche Upright.  
Amateur Gentleman. Jeffery Farnol.  
Amateur Inn, The. Albert Payson Terhune.  
Anabel at Sea. Samuel Merwin.  
An Accidental Accomplice. William Johnston.  
Ancestor Jorico. William J. Locke.  
And They Lived Happily Ever After. Meredith Nicholson.  
Angel Esquire. Edgar Wallace.  
Angel of Terror. Edgar Wallace.  
Anne of the Island. L. M. Montgomery.  
Anne's House of Dreams. L. M. Montgomery.  
Annihilation. Isabel Ostrander.  
Ann's Crime. R. T. M. Scott.  
An Ordeal of Honor. Anthony Pryde.  
Anything But the Truth. Carolyn Wells.  
April and Sally June. Margaret Piper Chalmers.  
Are All Men Alike, and The Lost Titan. Arthur Stringer.  
Aristocratic Miss Brewster, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Around Old Chester. Margaret Deland.  
Arrant Rover, The. Berta Ruck.  
As a Thief in the Night. R. Austin Freeman.  
A Self-Made Thief. Hulbert Footner.  
Astounding Crime on Torrington Road, The. William Gillette.  
At Sight of Gold. Cynthia Lombardi.  
At the Foot of the Rainbow. James B. Hendryx.  
At the Mercy of Tiberius. Augusta Evans Wilson.  
At the South Gate. Grace S. Richmond.  
Auction Block, The. Rex Beach.  
Aunt Jane of Kentucky. Eliza C. Hall.  
Aurelius Smith—Detective. R. T. M. Scott.  
Autocrat, The. Pearl Doles Bell.  
Aw Hell! Clarke Venable.

## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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- Bab: a Sub-Deb. Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
Babe Ruth's Own Book of Baseball. George Herman Ruth.  
Backwoods Princess, A. Hulbert Footner.  
Bad One, The. John Farrow.  
"Barabbas." Marie Corelli.  
Barberry Bush. Kathleen Norris.  
Barrier, The. Rex Beach.  
Bars of Iron, The. Ethel M. Dell.  
Bartenstein Mystery, The. J. S. Fletcher.  
Bar-20. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Bar-20 Days. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Bar 20 Rides Again, The. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Bar-20 Three. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Bat Wing. Sax Rohmer.  
Beauty and the Beast. Kathleen Norris.  
Beauty Mask, The. H. M. Clamp.  
Beginners, The. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Beg Pardon Sir! Reginald Wright Kauffman.  
Bella Donna. Robert Hichens.  
Bellamy Trial, The. Frances Noyes Hart.  
Belonging. Olive Wadsley.  
Beloved Pawn, The. Harold Titus.  
Beloved Rajah, The. A. E. R. Craig.  
Beloved Traitor, The. Frank L. Packard.  
Beloved Vagabond, The. William J. Locke.  
Beloved Woman, The. Kathleen Norris.  
Beltane the Smith. Jeffery Farnol.  
Benson Murder Case, The. S. S. Van Dine.  
Best Ghost Stories, The. Edited by Bohun Lynch.  
Beyond the Frontier. Randall Parrish.  
Bigamist, The. John Jay Chichester.  
Big Brother. Rex Beach.  
Big Mogul, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Big Shot, The. Frank L. Packard.  
Big Timber. Bertrand W. Sinclair.  
Bill the Conqueror. P. Q. Wodehouse.  
Bill—The Sheik. A. M. Williamson.  
Bird of Freedom. Hugh Pendexter.  
Black Abbot, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Black Bartlemy's Treasure. Jeffery Farnol.  
Black Bull, The. H. Bedford-Jones.  
Black Buttes. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Black Company, The. W. B. M. Ferguson.  
Black Flemings, The. Kathleen Norris.  
Black Butterflies. Elizabeth Jordan.  
Black Glove, The. J. G. Sarasin.



## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

- Black Ivory. Polan Banks.  
Black Magician, The. R. T. M. Scott.  
Black Oxen. Gertrude Atherton.  
Black Stamp, The. Will Scott.  
Black Turret, The. Patrick Wynnton.  
Blades. George Barr McCutcheon.  
Blair's Attic. Joseph C. Lincoln and Freeman Lincoln.  
Blatchington Tangle, The. G. D. H. and Margaret Cole.  
Bleston Mystery, The. Robert Milward Kennedy.  
Bloody Ground. Oscar J. Friend.  
Blue Blood. Owen Johnson.  
Blue Car Mystery, The. Natalie Sumner Lincoln.  
Blue Castle, The. L. M. Montgomery.  
Blue Hand. Edgar Wallace.  
Blue Jay, The. Max Brand.  
Bob, Son of Battle. Alfred Ollivant.  
Bondwoman, The. G. U. Ellis.  
Born Rich. Hughes Cornell.  
Borrowed Shield, The. Richard E. Enright.  
Boss of Eagle's Nest, The. William West Winter.  
Boss of the Diamond A. Robert Ames Bennet.  
Boss of the Tumbling H. Frank C. Robertson.  
Box With Broken Seals. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Branded. Robert Ames Bennet.  
Brass. Charles G. Norris.  
Brass Bowl. Louis Joseph Vance.  
Bravo Jim. W. D. Hoffman.  
Bread. Charles G. Norris.  
Bread and Jam. Nalbro Bartley.  
Break-Up, The. Esther Birdsall Darling.  
Breaking Point, The. Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
Bride's Progress, The. Harold Weston.  
Bright Shawl, The. Joseph Hergesheimer.  
Bring Me His Ears. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Broad Highway, The. Jeffery Farnol.  
Broken Barriers. Meredith Nicholson.  
Broken Waters. Frank L. Packard.  
Bronze Hand, The. Carolyn Wells.  
Brood of the Witch Queen. Sax Rohmer.  
Brook Evans. Susan Glaspell.  
Brown Study, The. Grace S. Richmond.  
Buck Peters, Ranchman. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Bullet Eater. Oscar J. Friend.  
Burned Evidence. Mrs. Wilson Woodrow.  
Bush Rancher, The. Harold Bindloss.  
Bush That Burned, A. Marjorie Barclay McClure.

# THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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Buster, The. William Patterson White.  
Butterfly. Kathleen Norris.

Cabbages and Kings. O. Henry.  
Cabin at the Trail's End. Sheba Hargreaves  
Callahans and the Murphys. Kathleen Norris.  
Calling of Dan Matthews. Harold Bell Wright.  
Can Women Forget? Florence Riddell.  
Cape Cod Stories. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Captain Brand of the Schooner "Centipede." Lieut. Henry A. Wise.  
Cap'n Dan's Daughter. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Cap'n Eri. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Cap'n Jonah's Fortune. James A. Cooper.  
Captains of Souls. Edgar Wallace.  
Cap'n Sue. Hulbert Footner.  
Cap'n Warren's Wards. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Cardigan. Robert W. Chambers.  
Carib Gold. Ellery H. Clark.  
Carnac's Folly. Sir Gilbert Parker.  
Carry On, Jeeves! P. G. Wodehouse.  
Case and the Girl. Randall Parrish.  
Case Book of Sherlock Holmes, The. A. Conan Doyle.  
Cask, The. Freeman Wills Crofts.  
Cat-O'Mountain. Arthur O. Friel.  
Car's Eye, The. R. Austin Freeman.  
Catspaw, The. Terry Shannon.  
Cattle. Winifred Eaton Reeve.  
Cattle Baron, The. Robert Ames Benner.  
Cavalier of Tennessee. Meredith Nicholson.  
Celestial City, The. Baroness Orczy.  
Certain Dr. Thorndyke, A. R. Austin Freeman.  
Certain People of Importance. Kathleen Norris.  
Chaffee of Roaring Horse. Ernest Haycox.  
Chance—and the Woman. Ellis Middleton.  
Charteris Mystery. A. Fielding.  
Cherry Square. Grace S. Richmond.  
Cheyne Mystery, The. Freeman Wills Crofts.  
Child of the North. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Child of the Wild. Edison Marshall.  
Children of Divorce. Owen Johnson.  
Chronicles of Avonlea. L. M. Montgomery.  
Cinema Murder, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
City of Lilies, The. Anthony Pryde and R. K. Weeks.  
City of Peril, The. Arthur Stringer.  
City of the Sun, The. Edwin L. Sabin.



# THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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- Clair De Lune. Anthony Pryde.  
Clever One, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Click of Triangle T. Oscar J. Friend.  
Clifford Affair, The. A. Fielding.  
Clock Strikes Two, The. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Clouded Pearl, The. Berta Ruck.  
Cloudy in the West. William Patterson White.  
Club of Masks, The. Allen Upward.  
Clue of the New Pin, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Clue of the Twisted Candle. Edgar Wallace.  
Coast of Enchantment. Burton E. Stevenson.  
Cock's Feather. Katherine Newlin Burt.  
Cold Harbour. Francis Brett Young.  
Colorado Jim. George Goodchild.  
Come Home. Stella G. S. Perry.  
Coming of Cassidy, The. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Coming of Cosgrove, The. Laurie Y. Erskine.  
Coming of the Law, The. Charles A. Selzer.  
Communicating Door, The. Wadsworth Camp.  
Concerning Him. Introduced by the writer of "To M. I. G."  
Confidence Man, The. Laurie Y. Erskine.  
Conquest of Canaan, The. Booth Tarkington.  
Conquering Lover, The. Pamela Wynne.  
Conqueror Passes, A. Larry Barretto.  
Constant Nymph, The. Margaret Kennedy.  
Contraband. Clarence Budington Kelland.  
Copper Moon. Edwin Bateman Morris.  
Corbin Necklace, The. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Corsican Justice. J. G. Sarasin.  
Corson of the J. C. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Cottonwood Gulch. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Court of Inquiry, A. Grace S. Richmond.  
Cow Woman, The. George Gilbert.  
Crime at Red Towers. Chester K. Steele.  
Crime in the Crypt, The. Carolyn Wells.  
Crimson Circle, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Crooked. Maximilian Foster.  
Crooked Cross, The. Charles J. Dutton.  
Crook's Shadow, The. J. Jefferson Farjeon.  
Cross Trails. Harold Bindloss.  
Cruel Fellowship. Cyril Hume.  
Cryder of the Big Woods. George C. Shedd.  
Cry in the Wilderness, A. Mary E. Waller.  
Crystal Cup, The. Gertrude Atherton.  
Cup of Fury, The. Rupert Hughes.  
Curious Quest, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.

## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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- Gideon. Inez Haynes Irwin.  
Gift in the Gauntlet, The. Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.  
Gift of the Desert. Randall Parrish.  
Girl of the Golden West. David Belasco.  
Girl from the Big Horn Country, The. Mary Ellen Chase.  
Girl From Scotland Yard. Edgar Wallace.  
Girl Who Cast Out Fear. Dorothy Speare.  
Glitter. Katherine Brush.  
Glory Rides the Range. Ethel and James Dorrance.  
God and the Grocerymen. Harold Bell Wright.  
God's Country and the Woman. James Oliver Curwood.  
Go-Getter Gary. Robert Ames Bennet.  
Going Some. Rex Beach.  
Gold and the Mounted. James B. Hendryx.  
Golden Ballast. H. De Vere Stacpoole.  
Golden Beast, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Golden Butterfly. A. M. Williamson.  
Golden Centipede, The. Louise Gerard.  
Golden Cocoon. Ruth Cross.  
Golden Ladder, The. Major Rupert Hughes.  
Golden Road, The. L. M. Montgomery.  
Golden Scorpion, The. Sax Rohmer.  
Golden Spurs, The. J. S. Fletcher.  
Golden Woman, The. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Gold Tooth, The. John Taine.  
Golf Without Tears. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Good Red Bricks, The. Mary Synon.  
Good References. E. J. Rath.  
Goose Woman, The. Rex Beach.  
Gordon of the Lost Lagoon. Robert Watson.  
Granite and Clay. Sara Ware Basset.  
Graven Image. Margaret Widdemer.  
Gray Angels, The. Nalbro Bartley.  
Gray Magic. Herman Landon.  
Gray Phantom, The. Herman Landon.  
Gray Phantom's Return. Herman Landon.  
Gray Terror. Herman Landon.  
Greater Love Hath No Man. Frank L. Packard.  
Great Impersonation, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Great Moment, The. Elinor Glyn.  
Great Prince Shan, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Green Archer, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Green Blot, The. Sinclair Gluck.  
Green Dolphin, The. Sara Ware Basset.  
Green Dragon, The. J. Jefferson Farjeon.  
Green Eyes of Bast, The. Sax Rohmer.



## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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Green Goddess, The. Louise Jordan Miln.  
Green Ray. Vance Thompson.  
Green Rust. Edgar Wallace.  
Green Scarf, The. Clyde Perrin.  
Green Shadow, The. Herman Landon.  
Green Timber. Harold Bindloss.  
Grey Face. Sax Rohmer.  
Greyfriars Bobby. Eleanor Atkinson.  
Groote Park Murder, The. Freeman Wills Crofts.  
Gun Brand, The. James B. Hendryx.  
Gun Gospel, The. W. D. Hoffman.  
Gun Harvest. Oscar J. Friend.  
Gunman's Bluff. Edgar Wallace.  
Gun Tamer, The. Max Brand.  
Guyfford of Weare. Jeffery Farnol.

Hairy Arm, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Hand and Ring. Anna Katherine Green.  
Hand of Fu-Manchu, The. Sax Rohmer.  
Hand of Peril, The. Arthur Stringer.  
Handsome Man, The. Margaret Turnbull.  
Hands Unseen. Herman Landon.  
Hard Wood. Arthur O. Friel.  
Harness. A. Hamilton Gibbs.  
Harriet and the Piper. Kathleen Norris.  
Harry Idaho. Hugh Pendexter.  
Harvey Garrard's Crime. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Hate. Arthur D. Howden Smith.  
Hawkeye, The. Herbert Quick.  
Head of the House of Coombe, The. Frances Hodgson Burnett  
Hearth of Happiness, The. Anne Shannon Monroe.  
Hearthstones. Elizabeth Stancy Payne.  
Heart of Katie O'Doone. Leroy Scott.  
Heart of the Desert. Honore Willsie Morrow.  
Heart of the Hills, The. John Fox, Jr.  
Heart of the Sunset. Rex Beach.  
Heart of Unaga, The. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Hedges. Elizabeth Stancy Payne.  
Helen of the Old House. Harold Bell Wright.  
He Rather Enjoyed It. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Her Mother's Daughter. Nalbro Bartley.  
Her Pirate Partner. Berta Ruck.  
Her Reputation. Talbot Mundy.  
Hidden Kingdom, The. Francis Beeding.  
Hidden Places, The. Bertrand W. Sinclair.

## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

---

- Cursed Be the Treasure. H. B. Drake.  
Cytherea. Joseph Hergesheimer.  
Cy Whittaker's Place. Joseph C. Lincoln.
- Daffodil Murder, The. Edgar Wallace.  
Dagger, The. Anthony Wynne.  
Dalehouse Murder, The. Francis Everton.  
Damsel in Distress, A. Pelham G. Wodehouse.  
Dan Barry's Daughter. Max Brand.  
Dance Magic. Clarence Budington Kelland.  
Dancers in the Dark. Dorothy Speare.  
Dancing Silhouette, The. Natalie Sumner Lincoln.  
Dancing Star. Berta Ruck.  
Danger. Ernest Poole.  
Danger and Other Stories. A. Conan Doyle.  
Dangerous Business. Edwin Balmer.  
Dark Duel. Marguerite Steen.  
Darkest Spot, The. Lee Thayer.  
Dark Eyes of London, The. Edgar Wallace.  
David Strange. Nelia Gardner White.  
Daughter of the House. Carolyn Wells.  
Daughter of the Sands, A. Frances Everard.  
Daughter Pays, The. Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.  
David Copperfield. Charles Dickens.  
Deadfall, The. Edison Marshall.  
Dead Men's Shoes. Lee Thayer.  
Dead Ride Hard, The. Louis Joseph Vance.  
Dear Pretender, The. Alice Ross Colver.  
Death Maker, The. Austin J. Small.  
Deeper Scar, The. Sinclair Gluck.  
Deep in the Hearts of Men. Mary E. Waller.  
Deep Lake Mystery. Carolyn Wells.  
Deep Seam, The. Jack Bethea.  
Defenders, The. Stella G. S. Perry.  
Delight. Mazo de la Roche.  
Demon Caravan, The. Georges Surdez.  
Depot Master, The. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Desert Dust. Edwin L. Sabin.  
Desert Healer. E. M. Hull.  
Desire. Gladys Johnson.  
Desire of His Life, and Other Stories. Ethel M. Dell.  
Destiny. Rupert Hughes.  
Devil of Pei-ling, The. Herbert Asbury.  
Devil's Mantle, The. Frank L. Packard.  
Devil's Paw, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.



## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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- Hidden Trails. William Patterson White.  
Hide in the Dark. Frances Noyes Hart.  
High Adventure, The. Jeffery Farnol.  
High Fires. Marjorie Barclay McClure.  
High Noon. Crosbie Garstin.  
Hildegarde. Kathleen Norris.  
His Official Fiancee. Berta Ruck.  
His Royal Nibs. Winifred Eaton Reeve.  
His Second Venture. Mrs. Ballie Reynolds.  
Homeland. Margaret Hill McCarter.  
Homestead Ranch. Elizabeth G. Young.  
Honk! Doris F. Halman.  
Honor of the Big Snows. James Oliver Curwood.  
Honourable Jim, The. Baroness Orczy.  
Hopalong Cassidy. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Hopalong Cassidy's Protege. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Hopalong Cassidy Returns. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Hope of Happiness, The. Meredith Nicholson.  
Horseman of Death, The. Anthony Wynne.  
Horseshoe Robinson. John P. Kennedy.  
Hotel, The. Elizabeth Bowen.  
House Across the Way, The. Foxhall Daingerfield.  
House of Adventure, The. Warwick Deeping.  
House of Disappearance. J. Jefferson Farjeon.  
House of Dr. Edwardes. Francis Beeding.  
House of Fear, The. Robert W. Service.  
House of Happiness and Other Stories, The. Ethel M. Dell.  
House of Intrigue, The. Arthur Stringer.  
House of Sin, The. Allen Upward.  
House of the Missing, The. Sinclair Gluck.  
House On the Downs, The. G. E. Locke.  
House On Tollard Ridge. John Rhode.  
How Many Cards? Isabel Ostrander.  
Hula. Armine Von Tempski.  
Hunchback of Notre Dame. Victor Hugo.  
Huntress, The. Hulbert Footner.  
Hustler Joe and Other Stories. Eleanor H. Porter.
- If Dreams Come True. Alice Ross Colver.  
Illiterate Digest, The. Will Rogers.  
Immortal Girl, The. Berta Ruck.  
Imperfect Impostor. Norman Venner.  
In Another Girl's Shoes. Berta Ruck.  
In a Shantung Garden. Louise Jordan Miln.  
In a Yun-Nan Courtyard. Louise Jordan Miln.

## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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Keziah Coffin. Joseph C. Lincoln.  
Keith of the Border. Randall Parrish.  
Kilmeny of the Orchard. L. M. Montgomery.  
Kindling and Ashes. George Barr McCutcheon.  
King By Night, A. Edgar Wallace.  
Kingdom of the Blind. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Kingdoms of the World. Margareta Tuttle.  
Kingmakers. Burton E. Stevenson.  
King of Kearsarge. Arthur O. Friel.  
King of the Khyber Rifles. Talbot Mundy.  
King of the Wilderness. Albert Cooper Allen.  
Kings in Exile. Alphonse Daudet.  
King's Passport, The. H. Bedford-Jones.  
King Spruce. Holman Day.  
Knave of Diamonds, The. Ethel M. Dell.  
Kneel To The Prettiest. Berta Ruck.  
Knights of the Desert. W. D. Hoffman.  
Knights of the Horseshoe. Wm. A. Caruthers.  
Knuckles. Clarence Budington Kelland.

Labels. A. Hamilton Gibbs.  
Ladies of Lyndon, The. Margaret Kennedy.  
Lady Doc, The. Caroline Lockhart.  
Lady of Pentlands, The. Elizabeth Jordan.  
Lady of Stainless Raiment. Mathilde Eiker.  
Lady of the Air, The. C. N. and A. M. Williamson.  
Lady Slipper. Ella Wister Haines.  
Lady, What of Life? Lesley Storm.  
Lake Mystery, The. Marvin Dana.  
Land of Big Rivers, The. A. M. Chisholm.  
Land of Forgotten Men. Edison Marshall.  
Land of Mist, The. A. Conan Doyle.  
Land of Strong Men, The. A. M. Chisholm.  
Lane, The. Helen Sherman Griffith.  
Laramie Holds the Range. Frank H. Spearman.  
Last Trail, The. Zane Grey.  
Last Trap, The. Sinclair Gluck.  
Laughing Girl, The. Robert W. Chambers.  
Laughing Rider, The. Laurie Y. Erskine.  
Lavender Lad, The. Dolf Wyllarde.  
Law Breakers, The. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Law of the Lean Lands. Chart Pitt.  
Leap Year Girl, The. Berta Ruck.  
Leave It to Psmith. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Lena Rivers. Mary J. Holmes.



## THE BEST OF RECENT FICTION

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Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President. Will Rogers.  
Lew Tyler and the Ladies. Wallace Irwin.  
Light Beyond, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Lights Along the Ledges. Elizabeth Stancy Payne.  
Lights Up. Grace S. Richmond.  
Lily and the Sword, The. Anthony Pryde.  
Limping Sheriff, The. Arthur Preston.  
Lindbergh, The Lone Eagle. George Buchanan Fife.  
Lin McLean. Owen Wister.  
Lion Tamer, The. E. M. Hull.  
Lip Malvy's Wife. George Agnew Chamberlain.  
Listening Post, The. Grace S. Richmond.  
Lister's Great Adventure. Harold Bindloss.  
Little Moment of Happiness. Clarence Budington Kelland.  
Little Pardner and Other Stories. Eleanor H. Porter.  
Little Red Foot, The. Robert W. Chambers.  
Little Ships. Kathleen Norris.  
Little Sins. Katherine Brush.  
Little Warrior, The. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Little White Hag, The. Francis Beeding.  
Locked Book, The. Frank L. Packard.  
Lone Hand, The. Joseph B. Ames.  
Lone Hand, The. Harold Bindloss.  
Lonely Warrior, The. Claude C. Washburn.  
Lonesome Land. B. M. Bower.  
Lone Wolf, The. Louis Joseph Vance.  
Long Live the King. Mary Roberts Rinehart.  
Long, Long Trail, The. George Owen Baxter.  
Lookout Girl, The. Alice Ross Colver.  
Lord of Terror, The. Marcel Allain.  
Loring Mystery, The. Jeffery Farnol.  
Losing Gain, The. Blanche Upright.  
Lost Prince, The. Frances Hodgson Burnett.  
Lost Wolf. Peter Morland.  
Lost World, The. A. Conan Doyle.  
Lotus of the Dusk. Dorothy Graham.  
Loudon from Laramie. Joseph B. Ames.  
Louisiana Lou. William West Winter.  
Love Call. E. W. Savi.  
Love Link, The. Pearl Doles Bell.  
Lovely Ducklings, The. Rupert Hughes.  
Love Quest, The. Jean Wick.  
Love Talent, The. Ann Sumner.  
Loving Are the Daring. Holman Day.  
Luck of the Kid, The. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Luck of the Laird. Albert Payson Terhune.

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Indifference of Juliet, The. Grace S. Richmond.  
Indiscretions of Archie. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Inevitable Millionaires, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Infelice. Augusta Evans Wilson.  
Inn of the Hawk and Raven. George Barr McCutcheon.  
Innocent. Marie Correlli.  
Innocent Accomplice, The. Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.  
Innocent Adventuress. Mary Hastings Bradley.  
Innocents, The. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu. Sax Rohmer.  
Inspector French's Greatest Case. Freeman Wills Crofts.  
Interloper, The. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Interrupted Night, An. Isabella M. Alden. (Pansy).  
In the Brooding Wild. Ridgwell Cullum.  
Inverted Pyramid. Bertrand W. Sinclair.  
Invisible Woman, The. Herbert Quick.  
Iron Trail, The. Rex Beach.  
Iron Woman, The. Margaret Deland.  
Ishmael. Mrs. Southworth.  
Isle of Retribution, The. Edison Marshall.  
It Happened in Peking. Louise Jordan Miln.  
I Want to Be a Lady. Maximilian Foster.

Jack O'Judgment. Edgar Wallace.  
Jacob's Ladder. E. Phillips Oppenheim.  
Jean of the Lazy A. B. M. Bower.  
Jeeves. P. G. Wodehouse.  
Jenny Essenden. Anthony Pryde.  
Jill. Jean Wick.  
Jimmie Dale and the Phantom Clue. Frank L. Packard.  
Joan of Arc of the North Woods. Holman Day.  
Johndover. Margaret Cameron.  
Johnny Nelson. Clarence E. Mulford.  
Joseph Greer and His Daughter. Henry Kitchell Webster.  
Joy Ride. Berta Ruck.  
Judgment of Charis, The. Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.  
Judith of the Godless Valley. Honore Willsie Morrow.  
Julia. Baroness Von Hutton.  
Just Mother, and Other Stories. Eleanor H. Porter.  
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Kate Plus 10. Edgar Wallace.  
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