The Blue Lights

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CHAPTER I

THE big, mud-spattered touring car, which for the past hour had been plowing its way steadily northward from the city of Washington, hesitated for a moment before the gateway which marked the end of the well kept drive, then swept on to the house.

A man, stoutly built, keen of eye, showing haste in his every movement, sprang from the machine and ascended the veranda steps.

“Does Richard Duvall live here?” he inquired, curtly, of the smiling old colored woman who came to the door.

“‘Deed he do, suh. Does you want to see him?”

“Yes. At once, please. Tell him it is most important. My name is Hodgman.”

The servant eyed him with cool disfavor. “Set down, suh,” she remarked stiffly. “I’ll tell him you is here.”

The caller watched her, as she disappeared into the house, then cast himself impatiently into a chair and lit a cigar.

He paid no attention to the attempts of two clumsy collie puppies to attract his favorable notice, but contented himself with making a quick survey of the wide comfortable veranda, with its big roomy chairs, the wicker table, bearing a great jar of red peonies, the smooth green lawns, swept by the late afternoon sun.

“Fine old place,” he muttered to himself. “Wonder if I can persuade him to go?”

As the car which had brought Mr. Hodgman on his hasty trip from Washington dashed up to the front of the house, Grace Duvall, looking very charming in a blue linen dress, was just approaching it from the rear.

She held a pair of shears in her hand, and her apron was filled to overflowing with hundred-leaf roses. “Dick—oh, Dick!” she called, as she came down the long avenue of syringas and lilacs which led to the house. “The sweet peas are nearly ready to bloom.”

Richard Duvall, looking as simply pastoral as though he had never tracked an international crook to cover, raised his head from the flower bed, in which he had been carefully setting out circle after circle of geranium plants.

“Are they?” he laughed. “That’s good. Now all we need is a few good hot days.” He gathered up his trowel and rake, and started toward the barn.

Grace put her arm through her husband’s and together they strolled across the springy green turf, their faces smiling and happy. The honeymoon showed no signs of waning.

This lovely old country place, in southern Maryland, had been one of Richard Duvall’s dreams for many years, and after his marriage to Grace Ellicott, in Paris, it had become hers, as well. It was but a short time after their return to America that they decided to make it a reality.

Grace had encouraged her husband in the plan of giving up, for a time at least, his warfare against crime, his pursuit of criminals of the higher and more dangerous type, and had persuaded him to buy the farm which had once belonged to his mother’s people, and settle down to the life of a country gentleman.

His office was still maintained, under the able direction of one of his assistants, but Duvall gave little or no attention to its affairs. He was glad to withdraw, for the first time in over nine years, from active work, and devote his energies to early potatoes, prize dogs, hunters, and geranium plants —and, above all, to the peaceful enjoyment of his honeymoon, and the making of Grace the happiest woman in the world.

She, on her part, found in their present situation all the joys of existence for which she had longed. With little or no liking for the monotonous round of society and its duties, and a passionate love of nature, she found in the many and complex duties of managing her part of their extensive estate a far greater happiness than any which city life could have offered her.

The considerable fortune which her husband’s clever work while in Paris had restored to her, had been safely invested in well paying securities, and she found her greatest joy in utilizing at least a part of her income in beautifying their new home.

Richard had steadily refused to make any use of the money. It was a matter of pride with him, that his own savings had enabled him to purchase the property; but when Grace proposed to build an addition to the house, to provide him with a more comfortable library and work room, or insisted upon having the roads throughout the place elaborately macadamized, he was obliged to submit to her wishes. In this way, they planned and built for the future, together.

The farm was a large one, comprising some two hundred acres, and the old stone house surrounded by white oaks and tulip poplars had once been a show place, before the declining fortunes of Its former owners had caused it to fall into a state of mellow and time-honored decay. Now all was changed. Grace, with the able assistance of old Uncle Abe Turner, a relic of antebellum times, spent hours daily in bringing order out of the chaos of tangled myrtle and ivy, overgrown box and hedge, thickets of syringa and lilac bushes and weed-grown lawns.

It was a gigantic task, yet a joyous one—as it ever is, to those who came to it with the love of nature in their hearts. To Grace, the plants and shrubs, the great strong oaks, the towering poplars, each seemed to have a distinct personality.. Under her energetic hand, the place once more took on the aspect of well kept and orderly beauty which was such a contrast to its former down-at-the-heels appearance. It seemed as though the growing things realized the personal interest she took in them, and responded as they never respond to the Ignorant or unsympathetic.

Richard was concerned with his fields of timothy and clover, his early corn, his berries and fruit trees, to say nothing of his collies, his prize cows and Kentucky horses. In such a life, time never hangs heavy—he was busy studying, planning, working, from morning to night, and his active mind soon convinced his capable overseer and the farm hands as well that, although Richard Duvall was by no means a professional farmer, he could still show them a thing or two when it came to the rotation of crops, the spraying of fruit trees, or the proper treatment of worn out soils. These were aspects of farming life which the hide-bound conservatism of the local farmers caused them to jeer at, as newfangled notions gotten from books. Later when they saw the man who farmed with his head as well as his hands gather in two bushels where they had barely been able to secure one, they began to sit up and take notice.

“I got the new hedges all set out today,” Grace went on, as she patted her husband’s rather grimy hand. “They will be charming, against the gray stone of

the wall. But we must have new gate posts. The old ones are likely to tumble Into the road at any moment."

"I'll have Martin come out tomorrow and look them over. There's plenty of stone—down in the lower pasture. Why not carry the wall right along the whole front of the property? It ought not to cost a great deal."

"Wc will. And I'm going to have a new spring house built, too. The old one is falling to pieces." She looked up at her husband as he deposited the rake in the tool room and they started up the shaded walk toward the house. "Aren't you glad, Dick, that we're alive?"

He pressed her arm. "Well—I should say so, little girl! Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh—you know what your friends all said—that a man might as well be dead, as buried out here in the country. I think they are the ones who are not alive—cooped up in the city. Don't you?"

Richard nodded. He was thinking for the moment of his former active life—when some battle of wits with a noted crook had kept him sleepless for nights. "It's—rather different," he laughed. "Isn't it?"

"Yes—and much better. Don't you think so, dear? You wouldn't want to go back to it—would you?"

"Not for anything in the world," he assured her, as he swept the newly seeded lawns with a contented glance. "I liked the other life, of course—the excitement, the danger of it; but this is better—much better. Here, Don!" he called to a graceful collie which was barking vociferously at some distant vehicle in the road. "Come here and be quiet." He turned with Grace to the great vine-covered side porch and sank contentedly into a rocking chair. "Well, little girl—it's been a busy day, and I'm tired. We got the early rye all cut on the lower field today. Guess we'll put in late potatoes, after it's plowed. Here, Don—come back here! What's the matter with you?" He rose and whistled to the dog, which was bounding across the lawn in the direction of the road. "Come back, I say!"

"It's someone coming in," said Grace, uneasily. "In a machine. I wonder who it can be?"

“Possibly Hudson, the veterinary. He was coming today, to look at that heifer.”

“He hasn’t a machine like that. This is a big touring car.” She turned to her husband. “Hadn’t you better go in and fix up a bit, Dick? It may be company.”

Duvall laughed. “If it is, they’ll have to take me as I am,” he said; then again called to the dog.

A moment later the servant, who had interviewed the caller at the front door, came out to the side porch. “Gentleman to see you, Mr. Duvall,” she said. “Seems to be in a powerful hurry, too.”

“All right. Aunt Lucy,” said Duvall as he made his way to the front of the house.

“Is this Richard Duvall?” the visitor asked, in a quick, almost peremptory tone, as the detective joined him.

“Yes. That is my name. What can I do for you?”

The newcomer rose nervously from his chair and began chewing upon his half-smoked cigar. “Had the devil of a time to find you, Mr. Duvall.”

“You came out from Washington, I suppose,” remarked the detective, wondering what his visitor could want with him.

“Yes. Got your address from Hicks, of the Treasury Department. He said you were about twelve miles out. I seem to have come about twenty.”

“Perhaps you went around by way of Laurel. It’s much further, that way. What can I do for you, Mr. ” He paused interrogatively.

The man looked up at him quickly. “My name’s Hodgman—Thomas Hodgman —of New York. I represent John Stapleton.”

“John Stapleton, the banker?” asked Duvall, surprised.

“Yes. You know him, don’t you?”

“Yes. Quite well. I handled a case for him once—some years ago. Why?” Duvall’s face became grave. He began to realize that the interview was likely to

become suddenly important. John Stapleton, the multi-millionaire banker, was not in the habit of sending messengers to anyone, without good reason.

“So he said,” went on Mr. Hodgman, resuming his chair. “That’s why I’m here. He wants you to take another—”

“Another?”

“Yes. Another case. Quick.”

“It’s quite out of the question.”

“Nonsense! This is important. Money’s no object; name your own terms.”

“It isn’t a question of terms, Mr. Hodgman. I have withdrawn, for the time being at least, from active professional work.”

“I know.” The visitor flicked the ashes impatiently from his cigar and sought nervously in his pockets for a match. “That’s what they told me at your office, in New York. Said you were on your honeymoon, and didn’t want to be bothered.”

“That’s true. I don’t.”

“I told Mr. Stapleton that. He sent me to sec you; said you might change your mind, when you heard about the case.”

“It is quite impossible. I do not care to take up any detective work at present.”

Mr. Hodgman fidgeted nervously in his chair. “You must listen to what I have to say, Mr. Duvall, at any rate. Mr. Stapleton would not hear to my returning, after seeing you without having explained to you the nature of the case.”

Duvall leaned back, and began to fondle the long moist nose of the collie which sat beside his chair. “If you insist, Mr. Hodgman, I will listen, of course; but I assure you It will be quite useless.”

“I hope not. The case is most distressing. Mr. Stapleton’s only child has been kidnapped!”

“Kidnapped!” Duvall sat up with a start, every line of his face tense with

professional interest. “When? Where?”

“In Paris. The cablegram arrived this morning. I don’t know the details. Mrs. Stapleton has been spending the winter abroad. Mr. Stapleton was to join her this month. She is living at their house in the Avenue Kleber, Paris. The child was out walking with a nurse. It has been stolen. That’s all I know.”

“When did it happen?”

“Yesterday morning. Mrs. Stapleton did not cable at first, believing that the boy would be found during the course of the day. Naturally she did not wish to alarm her husband needlessly,, and the Prefect of Police, it seems, had assumed her that the child would undoubtedly be recovered before night. It wasn’t. This morning Mr. Stapleton got a long cablegram from his wife, telling him of the boy’s disappearance. He’s half crazy over the thing.”

“What is he going to do?”

“I don’t know. He sent me to see you at once. I’m his secretary, you know. When I couldn’t find you in New York, he told me to come here. I arrived in Washington an hour ago, and came right out. Mr. Stapleton said if any man on earth could find his boy for him, you could.”

“I suppose the thing is a matter of blackmail—ransom—”

“Very likely. They will probably demand a huge sum. No requests have been made, as yet, so far as I know. These fellows usually wait a week or two, before showing their hand, to give the unfortunate parents a chance to worry themselves half to death. I suppose they figure that then they’ll be more likely to come across with the money.”

“Yes. That’s the scheme. A rotten business, too. Hanging is too good for such wretches!”

“That’s what I say. Of course you can understand how Mr. Stapleton feels.”

“Of course. He will sail at once, I suppose.”

“That’s the worst of it. He can’t go till Saturday. Tomorrow’s Thursday—that’s three days off. There’s a deal on here involving millions—something he’s been

working to put through for months. Of course he doesn't consider anything like that, when it comes to his child; but he's got to think of his associates—men who have intrusted their money to him. He can't possibly sail before Saturday. He wants you to go ahead of him. There's a fast boat leaving in the morning. You could take that. We can have a conference tonight. It will mean mighty quick work, though." He glanced at his watch. "After six now. There's no train till midnight—the sleeper. But Mr. Stapleton told me to charter a special. We can be in New York by one o'clock in the morning, if we start right now." He looked at Duvall in eager expectancy.

The latter frowned, his gaze wandering off to the distant fields, where the newly plowed earth reminded him of his plans for the morrow. Yet here was a man, a friend, who had helped him much, in the earlier days of his career, begging him to come to his assistance in a matter almost of life or death. It was a difficult decision that he was called upon to make. The thought of leaving Grace hurt him deeply; yet she would prefer to stay behind, in case he should go, to look after the affairs of the place. With the assistance of the overseer and the hands, he knew that she could manage everything during a brief absence on his part—It seemed unlikely that the matter would require more than three or four weeks, at the outside.

Mr. Hodgman broke in upon his thoughts. "You'll go, Mr. Duvall? Mr. Stapleton is depending on you. He has the utmost faith in your abilities. He knows your familiarity with Paris —the work you have done there, in the past. He believes that, by intrusting the matter to a fellow countryman, he will get his boy back again. He hasn't much faith in foreign detectives. He's set his heart on having you start for Paris at once. I can't go back and tell him that you have refused." Mr. Hodgman spoke in a loud and earnest voice, due to his very evident excitement.

Neither he nor Duvall noticed that Grace had approached them, and was standing in the open doorway of the house.

Before the detective had an opportunity to reply, Grace spoke. "What is it, Richard?" she inquired, quietly.

Duvall rose, presented Mr. Hodgman to his wife, and bade her sit down. Then, in a few words, he acquainted her with the circumstances which led to the latter's visit.

“Think of that poor mother, alone there in Paris,” Hodgman supplemented. “Think of her suffering, her anxiety. I realize how much we are asking, to take Mr. Duvall away from you, especially at this time; but, it is Mr. Stapleton’s only child—a boy of six. You can understand how he must feel.”

Grace nodded. “Yes, I can understand,” she said, slowly, then turned to her husband.

“What do you think, dear?” he asked her.

“I think, Richard, that you had better go.”

Mr. Hodgman sprang to his feet’, and, coming over to Grace, took her hand. He knew that his battle was won. “I thank you, Mrs. Duvall,” he said, “on Mr. Stapleton’s account, as well as on my own. He will appreciate deeply what you have done, the sacrifice you are making, and he will not forget It.” He looked again at his watch nervously, the anxiety he felt clearly evident in his every movement. “We had best start at once, Mr. Duvall.”

Duvall rose. “I will join you in a short while, Mr. Hodgman. I wish to say a few words to my wife.” He took Grace’s arm and drew her within the house, leaving Mr. Hodgman pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

The conference between Grace and her husband was short. Each realized the distress which tore at the other’s heart, as well as the dangers he would in all probability be called upon to face; yet they met the situation calmly. “You will not be gone long,” she told him. “I can manage very weU.”

“I know you can, dear,” he said, pressing her to him. “I’m not worried about the place. You can run that as well as I can. It’s you, I’m worried about—cleaving you”—

“I’ll be all right,” she assured him, in spite of her tears. “I have Aunt Lucy, and old Uncle Abe, and Rose, and Jennie. I won’t be so ver’j lonely. And you will be very careful—and—and come back soon—won’t you?”

“Of course, dear. Very soon. Now I’d better get a few things together.”

Fifteen minutes later Grace Duvall stood on the steps of the veranda, watching the flying automobile as it rapidly became a little red blur in the distant road. It

was nearly dark. The frogs in the patch of marsh in the meadow were piping dismally. She shivered, and a great sense of desolation came over her. She sank into a chair and wept, while Don, inserting his long white muzzle between her hands, strove to lick away her tears.

She heard Aunt Lucy, the old negro cook, singing away at her work in the kitchen, accompanied by Uncle Abe, who occupied a bench on the back porch. Everything seemed strangely peaceful, and lonely, too, now that Richard had gone. She patted the eager head of the collie. “We’ll have to make the best of it, Don,” she said, and rose to enter the house.

Suddenly far down the road she heard the chugging of an automobile. They were not frequent visitors, upon this country road. Could It be Richard, she wondered, returning for something he had forgotten?

She stood, straining her eyes into the dusk, waiting, while with one hand she restrained the eager dog.

Presently she saw that the machine was not a red one. It was not Richard. She was about to enter the house, when she realized that the rapidly moving car had entered the grounds. She turned on the lights in the hallway and stood, waiting, the dog at her side bristling with anger.

In a moment the automobile had stopped, and almost before she realized it, a small, foreign-looking man stood on the doorstep before her. “Madame Duvall?” he inquired, quickly, in a voice which showed plainly his nationality.

“Yes,” she replied.

“Your husband! May I see him?”

“He is not at home.”

The newcomer seemed greatly disturbed. “Then I fear, Madame, that I shall be obliged to wait until he returns.”

“He will not return. He has gone away for sometime.”

“Ah! That is indeed a calamity!” The man’s face showed the keenest disappointment. “May I ask where I can find him?”

“It will be quite impossible.” Grace had no Intention of telling her visitor where her husband had gone. She knew too well the intricacies of his profession, for that. “You cannot find him.” She made as though to close the door, and thereby terminate the interview.

The newcomer realized her intention. Slowly he raised his hand, in the palm of which showed the seal of a ring, turned inward. It was of silver, with curious figures worked into it in gold. The man glanced from the ring to Grace, eying her steadily. “I think, Madame,” he said, with a meaning smile, “that you can trust me.”

Grace recognized the ring at once. It was similar to one she herself had worn, while engaged in the memorable search for the ivory snuff box for Monsieur Lefevre, Prefect of Police of Paris. Dear old Lefevre—the friend of Richard’s, and of her own! This man who stood before her must be a messenger from him.

“Come in, please,”, she said, quietly, and led the way to the library.

The man followed her, calling out a few words to his chauffeur as he did so. No sooner had they reached the great book-lined room, than he drew from his pocket a sealed envelope.

“Madame Duvall,” he said, earnestly, “Monsieur Lefevre has cabled to his representatives in Washington a message. That message is contained in this envelope. I have instructions to deliver it to your husband Immediately. In case I could not find him, I am to hand It to you.

Permit, me, Madame.” With a bow, he placed the message in her hand.

Grace took the envelope, broke the heavy seal which it bore, and drawing out a slip of paper, hastily read the contents. The message was from Monsieur Lefevre. It said:

My dear Duvall:

You promised, on the occasion of our last meeting, to come to me should I ever need you. I need you badly, my friend. Come at once, both you, and your dear wife. Lefevre.

Grace looked up at the man before her, the letter crumpled in her hand. Here was

a message the urgency of which could not be denied. She knew that, had Richard been at home, he would have gone to Paris at once in response to It; for it was to Monsieur Lefevre that they in reality owed all their happiness. She recalled vividly their wedding, with the lovable old Frenchman, acting as her father for the occasion, giving away the bride. She remembered the farewell dinner at the Prefect's house, and the beautiful gift he had given her on that occasion. Evidently Monsieur Lefevre desired Richard's presence very greatly, and her own as well. The thought suddenly came to her—why not go to him?

True, Richard had left her in charge of things at home; but she knew that, for a reasonable time, at least, they would go on smoothly enough without her. Hendricks, the overseer, was a capable and honest man, devoted to her and to her husband.

She could safely leave matters in his charge. Then, too, the thought of surprising Richard on the steamer sailing the next day appealed to her sense of mischief. How astounded he would be, to find her strolling along the deck! And how delighted, too! She wondered that the thought of accompanying him had not occurred to her more strongly before. She turned to the man, who stood watching her narrowly.

"You know the contents of this message?"

"Yes, Madame," he bowed, "It came to us by cable—in cipher."

"There is a train for New York at midnight, and a steamer tomorrow morning."

"Yes, Madame."

"Can you drive me to Washington in your car?"

"I shall be delighted, Madame." The fellow's eyes sparkled with satisfaction.

"Very well. Mr. Duvall is in New York. I will take the message to him. Wait here, please, until I get some clothes together and give some orders to my servants."

In half an hour, the thing was done. Hendricks, the overseer, had been given full instructions regarding taking charge of the place, with provision for his needs in the way of money, etc., and by ten o'clock, at which time the New York sleeper

was open, Grace was at the station, purchasing her ticket.

The obliging Frenchman gave her every assistance, and bade her bon voyage smilingly as he helped her aboard the train. She retired at once, and lay in her berth, reading a magazine, and picturing to herself Richard's mingled astonishment and joy at their meeting in the morning. This time, she was determined that their honeymoon should not be interrupted.

After a time, she fell asleep, and dreamed that she and Richard were sailing gaily toward Paris, in a large red touring car.

In the morning, she ate a hasty breakfast in the railway station, and took a taxicab for the steamship offices. By great good fortune, she was able to secure a cabin. Then she hastily visited a banking house where she was well known, provided herself with funds, and drove to the dock.

It wanted but half an hour till sailing time. Grace hastened to her stateroom, and busied herself in effacing the stains of her night of travel. She was determined to meet Richard looking her best.

It was not until the big steamer was passing through the Narrows that she came on deck, and began looking about for her husband. In all that crowd, she knew it would take time to find him. After searching for an hour, she felt somewhat surprised at not seeing him. After another hour had passed, her surprise turned to alarm. A hasty visit to the purser, and an examination of the sailing list, showed her the astonishing truth. Richard was not on board!

CHAPTER II

RICHARD DUVALL arrived in New York at half past one o’clock Thursday morning. Hodgman, Mr. Stapleton’s secretary, had wired ahead the news of their coming, and the banker’s limousine awaited them at the railway station. Fifteen minutes later they were ascending the steps of Mr. Stapleton’s residence on Fifth Avenue.

Duvall had not been to the house before. His previous interviews with the banker had taken place at the latter’s office, in Broad Street. He had no time now, however, to observe the luxury of his surroundings. Mr. Hodgman hurried him at once to the library, and in a few moments Mr. Stapleton had joined them.

He greeted Duvall with a nervous handshake, and thanked him for his prompt coming. He was clearly laboring under an intense mental strain.

“Mr. Hodgman has explained my reasons for sending for you, Mr. Duvall?” he inquired, sinking into a great leather-covered chair.

“Yes.” Duvall nodded.

“Then you can appreciate my feelings.” He sat in silence for several moments, looking gloomily at the floor.

“Perfectly.”

“The devils! I wouldn’t care if they were to steal my property—money, securities, anything like that. I can fight them—on that basis. But my child! Don’t you see why your coming was of the utmost importance to me? I don’t dare move against these rascals openly. If I do, they will threaten to retaliate by injuring my boy, and I am powerless. Whatever I do, must be done secretly. No one must know that you are in my employ. No one must know your object in going to Paris. You see that?”

“Most certainly. These fellows cannot hold you responsible for any moves the police authorities of Paris may make; over them you of course have no control. But if you make any efforts on your own account, any independent efforts, to recover your boy, they must by all means be made in secret.”

“Exactly. You understand, then, what you are to do?”

“Yes. But first I must ask you, Mr. Stapleton, to give me some account of the affair. Mr.

Hodgman has told me only that your son has been kidnapped. No doubt you have learned by this time how the thing was done.”

“What I have learned, Mr. Duvall, convinces me of the importance of being on the ground at once. The affair, as cabled to me by my wife, is preposterous—absurd!” He again gazed at the floor in gloomy preoccupation.

“How so?” the detective inquired.

“I will tell you. My boy, who, as you know, is six years old, has been in the habit of driving, each morning, accompanied by his nurse, from my house in the Avenue Kleber, to the Bois de Boulogne. On arriving in the Bois, it has been their habit to leave the automobile in which they came, and spend an hour or more walking and playing on the grass. I have insisted on this, because the boy needs exercise, and he cannot get it driving about in a motor car.”

“During this hour what becomes of Ae car?” asked Duvall.

“Our orders have been, of course, for the chauffeur to wait, within sight and call. I believe he has done so.”

“Thank you. Go ahead.”

“On Wednesday the nurse took Jack—the boy’s name is Jack—to the Bois as usuaL She played about with him on the grass for probably an hour. Then she sat down to rest. Jack was standing near her, playing with a rubber ball. She says—and, gentlemen, my wife cables me that she solemnly swears to the truth of her statements —that she turned away for a moment to observe passing vehicles in the road—turned back again to the child—and found that he was gone.”

“Gone—but how?”

“How? That’s the question. Here is this woman, sitting on the grass, with the child, a hundred yards from the road, in the middle of a large field of grass—a lawn. No one is within sight. The nearest person, it appears from her testimony,

is the chauffeur, three hundred feet away, in the road. The woman turns her head for a moment, looks about—and the boy is gone. That is the story she tells, and which my wife has cabled to me. Do you wonder that I call it preposterous?"

"Hardly," remarked Duvall, with a grim smile. "The boy could not have vanished into thin air. The woman must be lying."

"That, Mr. Duvall, is what I cannot understand. I cannot believe that the woman is lying. My wife cannot believe it. She has been in our employ ever since the boy was born, and is devoted to him. Mrs. Stapleton cables that she is completely prostrated."

"But, Mr. Stapleton, you can hardly believe such a story! How could the child have been stolen, if her story is true? It is, as you say, preposterous."

"I do not say that the story is true, Mr. Duvall. I say that I do not think that Mary is lying. She is telling what she believes to be the truth. She turned her head for a moment—the boy was gone. That is what she says, and I believe her. The question is—how is it possible?"

"It isn't," Hodgman grunted.

"Everything is possible, Hodgman," said the banker, reprovingly. "The best proof of that, in this case, is that it has happened. What means were used, I cannot imagine; but the apparently impossible has happened. The boy is gone!"

"Is the nurse a young woman?" the detective inquired.

"About thirty, I should say."

"An American?"

"Yes. Of Irish parentage. Her name is Lanahan—Mary Lanahan."

"A New Yorker?"

"She comes from Paterson, New Jersey. Her people live there."

"Are there any other details—any other points of interest?"

“None, so far as I know. What I have told you, is what has been cabled to me by Mrs. Stapleton. She is naturally in a more or less hysterical condition. Nothing can be accomplished here. I want you to leave by today’s steamer. I myself, I regret to say, cannot go until Saturday.” He passed his hand nervously across his forehead. “Only matters of the most vital importance could keep me here at such a time, Mr. Duvall; but, unfortunately, such matters confront me now.”

“Have you any reason to believe, Mr. Stapleton,” Duvall inquired, “that the kidnapping is the act of persons from this side of the water? Have any such attempts been made in the past?”

Mr. Stapleton remained silent for sometime, buried in thought. Presently he spoke. “I am a rich man, Mr. Duvall–a very rich man. Men in my position are constantly in receipt of letters of a threatening nature. I have received many such letters, in the past.”

“Was the matter of the child mentioned in any of them? Were threats made involving him?”

“There was one such letter.”

“When did you receive it?”

“Last fall—perhaps six months ago.”

“Have you the letter now?”

“Yes.”

“May I see it?”

The banker rose, went to a heavy rosewood desk at one side of the room, drew open one of its drawers, and removed a steel despatch box. He opened it with a slender key and took out a package of letters. From these, after some hesitation, he selected one and silently handed it to Duvall.

The detective examined the letter carefully. It was enclosed in a cheap white envelope, such as are sold at all post offices, having the stamp printed on it. The letter itself was roughly printed in ink on a sheet of ruled paper evidently torn from an ordinary five-cent pad. It said:

“We demand fifty thousand dollars, to be placed in thousand-dollar bills inside a cigar box and expressed to John Smith, c/o Express Company, Paterson, N. J., next Monday afternoon. The man who will call for the package on Tuesday will know nothing about the matter, and if you arrest him, you will find out nothing. Keep this to yourself and do as we say, if you value the safety of your child.”

There was no signature to the letter, Duvall read it through with great care, then turned to Mr. Stapleton.

“You have observed, I suppose, that the place to which the money was to be sent, Paterson, New Jersey, is the home of your child’s nurse, Mary Lanahan.”

Mr. Stapleton started. “I confess,” he said “that, in the agitated state of mind into which this affair has thrown me, I had completely overlooked the coincidence. What do you infer from it?”

“Only this, Mr. Stapleton, that Mary Lanahan may know more about this matter than she is willing to let on. I must keep this letter for the present.”

“Very well.” The banker nodded. “It may prove a valuable clue.”

“Possibly. And further, Mr, Stapleton, I shall not sail by today’s steamer.”

“But—why not?” Stapleton sat up in his chair in surprise. “You will lose two days.”

“I do not think they will be lost. I must make some investigations in Paterson, before I leave here. Please give me, if you can, the address of Mary Lanahan’s parents.”

Mr. Stapleton frowned. “I am not sure that I can do so, Mr. Duvall. My wife has charge of these matters. But I recollect having heard that her father, Patrick Lanahan, is a florist in a small way, and no doubt you can readily locate him. But I fear you will be losing valuable time.”

Duvall rose. “I feel, as you do, Mr. Stapleton, that I should be in Paris at the earliest possible moment; but I think you will agree with me that some Investigations on this side before I go are absolutely necessary, and may prove of inestimable value afterwards.”

Mr. Stapleton was silent for several minutes. Presently he raised his head. “Under the circumstances, Mr. Duvall, I am forced to admit the truth of what you say. Conduct your investigations as quickly as possible, however; for we must positively sail by Saturday’s boat.”

“I shall be ready then.” Duvall took up his hat. “Now I think I had better get a few hours’ sleep, and in the morning I will make an early start for Paterson.” He bowed to the banker and Mr. Hodgman. “Good night, gentlemen. I shall see you both on Saturday morning. The steamer sails shortly after noon, I believe. Suppose I come here at ten o’clock, and let you know what I have learned?”

Mr. Stapleton rose. “If I receive any further news of importance from Paris, Mr. Duvall, I will advise you at your hotel. Where arc you stopping?”

Duvall gave the name of a Times Square hotel at which he usually stopped, and with a quick “good night” left the house.

It was shortly after nine o’clock the next morning when he descended from the train at Paterson, and going to a nearby drug store, consulted the directory for the address of Patrick Lanahan. He found it without difficulty, and, by means of an electric car, was soon before the florist’s door.

The place was situated on the outskirts of the town, and consisted of a small, rather mean-looking cottage, from which spread out on each side, like the two wings of an aeroplane, the long glass greenhouses.

A little gate opened to a short brick path, leading to the front door of the house.

Duvall went up the path and rang the door bell. A wholesome-looking Irish woman, of perhaps fifty, opened the door, and, in response to his questions, told him that her husband, Patrick, was out in the garden at the rear of the house, busy with his plants.

She directed the detective along a narrow areaway at the side of the house, and in a moment reappeared at the back door.

“Pat,” she called. “Oh, Pat! Here’s a gentleman to see you.”

A short, heavy-set man, with gray hair and mustache and a ruddy and weatherbeaten face, arose from among a litter of flowerpots and bulbs.

“What can I do for you, sir?” he asked, coming forward and wiping his hands upon his overalls.

The detective studied the man before him intently. The honest and clear-looking eyes told him nothing that was not favorable.

“I came to ask you a few questions, Mr. Lanahan.”

“Questions, is it? About what?” The blue eyes showed a sudden flare of suspicion.

“About yourself, and your family.”

“Who may you be, then? is it the tax man?”

Duvall smiled. “Not the tax man,” he said. “I represent a firm of lawyers in Washington. My name is Johnson.”

Lanahan, still suspicious, pointed to a couple of kitchen chairs that stood on the brick-paved yard beneath a trellis covered with hop vines. “Sit down, sir. I’ll have a 3moke, if you don’t mind.” He began to fill his short clay pipe. “What would lawyers in Washington be wantin’ with me?”

“That is what I wish to find out, Mr. Lanahan. We—my firm—have been advised that a certain Michael Lanahan, of Dublin, recently died, leaving a large estate. We are trying to find his heirs. Tell me something about yourself and your family.”

The look of suspicion and reserve which the old man had up to this time shown faded from his face, and was replaced by a smile of incredulity. “Money, is it?” he laughed. “Mary—that’s my wife—has been seein’ bubbles in her tay for the week past. What is it you would know?”

“Are you from Dublin?”

“Me father was. I was born right here in Jersey, meself.”

“What was his name?”

“Patrick, the same as me own. But he had a brother, Mike.”

“Ah. It may be the same.” Duvall pretended a sudden interest. “His business?”

“Mike’s? Faith—I never heard he had any, lest it was drinkin’ all the good liquor he could lay his hands on.”

Duvall pretended to make a series of entries in his notebook. “Now about yourself, Mr. Lanahan. Have you any children? Of course, should there be any money coming to you, they would share in it.”

“Children, is it? I have two.”

“Boys?”

“One is a boy—a man be now, I should say. He’s in the city—workin’. His name is Barney.”

“What does he do?”

Lanahan looked up with a quick frown. “The last I heard tell, he was tendin’ bar, Mr. Johnson —over at Callahan’s saloon, on the Bowery. He’s wild—wild—like me uncle Mike, I should say.”

“And the other?”

The old man’s face took on a contented look. “The other is me daughter Mary, bless her. She’s nurse in the family of old man Stapleton, the millionaire.”

- Duvall closed his book. “I see,” he remarked, pleasantly. “She’s not married, I suppose?”

“Mary?” Divil a bit! For a time, she was sweet on a French chuffer that worked for Mr. Stapleton; but the fellow’s gone, now, and she’s clane forgot him. That was near a year ago.”

“Ah, yes. Do you happen to remember his name?

“Alphonse, it was—Alphonse Valentin, or some such joke of a name. A comic valentine he was, too, with his dinky little mustache and his cigarettes.” He laughed loudly. “Imagine my Mary, married to a gink like that!”

Duvall replaced his notebook in his pocket and rose. “I’m mightily obliged to you, Mr. Lanahan. We will advise you at once, if our investigations show that you are related to the Michael Lanahan whose fortune is in our hands. I’m obliged to you for your courtesy.”

The. florist nodded. “You’re welcome, sir. I guess them Lanahan’s must be a different breed. I never heard tell of any of my people makin’ any fortune. Good day, sir.” He turned to his work, chuckling.

Duvall rode back to the station, and took the first train for New York. It was clear that Mary Lanahan’s parents had nothing in common with blackmailers and kidnappers. Their honesty was as evident as the blueness of their eyes, or the redness of their hair. But the information about Alphonse Valentin, the chauffeur, and Barney, Mr. Lanahan’s son, seemed more promising.

It was close to one o’clock when Duvall arrived at Callahan’s saloon, on the Bowery, near Canal Street. Here a disappointment awaited him. Barney Lanahan had thrown up his job and left two months before. Callahan had no idea where he had gone. He had not been about the place since. A negro porter volunteered the information that he had seen the man entering the Broadway saloon of an ex-prizefighter some weeks before; but, beyond that, Duvall could learn nothing.

After a hasty luncheon he went to his office on Union Square, where his unexpected appearance caused his assistants unlimited surprise. He directed them to locate Barney Lanahan at the earliest possible moment. He then called up Mr. Stapleton’s secretary, Mr. Hodgman, and inquired about the chauffeur.

Mr. Hodgman informed him that the banker had employed Valentin in Paris some eighteen months previous, and had brought him to this country, where he had remained in his employ for about six months. He had been discharged, through some dishonesty in the matter of purchasing supplies, and nothing further had been seen or heard of him.

Duvall, on receiving this information, proceeded at once to the office of the French line, and asked permission to inspect their passenger lists for the past year. He concluded that if Valentin had anything to do with the kidnapping of Mr. Stapleton’s boy, he was, in all probability, in Paris, and, if so, would almost certainly have crossed by this line. He was therefore not at all surprised to find the name of Alphonse Valentin among those sailing during the preceding March.

There was little more that he could accomplish, now, beyond writing a long letter to Grace, whom he naturally supposed to be patiently awaiting his return in the country. He had a short interview with Mr. Hodgman in the evening, and was lucky enough to secure a photograph of Alphonse Valentin, the chauffeur, taken at the steering wheel of his machine. The car had, it seemed, been photographed, along with a party of guests, by a friend of Mr. Stapleton's with a leaning toward amateur photography. Duvall placed the photograph among his belongings with a smile of satisfaction. He felt that his delay had been by no means unprofitable.

One other step he took, before leaving. Accompanied by Mr. Hodgman, he made a careful inspection of the room which had been occupied by the nurse, Mary Lanahan, at the Stapleton house. The results were distressingly meager. All the woman's belongings she had evidently taken with her, on going abroad. There appeared to be nothing which would afford the slightest clue to her character or habits.

Mr. Hodgman turned to the door with an Impatient frown. "Nothing here," he growled, and was about to leave the room.

"Nothing much," said Duvall, glancing carelessly at the wooden edge of the bureau. "This woman, Mary Lanahan, is evidently an up-to-date sort of person."

Hodgman paused. "Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Smokes cigarettes, I see."

"That so. How do you know?"

Duvall smiled. "Too simple even to mention, Mr. Hodgman. See those burns on the varnish?" He pointed to a number of spots along the edge of the dresser. "Always find them somewhere about, where there's a cigarette smoker. He gazed out of the window for a moment. "Rooms tell a great deal about the personality of the people who have occupied them. For instance, I've never seen this Lanahan girl, but I know that she's not over five feet four, that she has light hair, that she reads in bed, that she writes with a stub pen, and that she's a Roman Catholic. Furthermore, she is left handed, Inclined to be vain, wears her hair in waves, or curls, in front, is fond of the theater, and has a long narrow scar on the palm of her left hand."

He chuckled quietly, as he saw Mr. Hodgman's look of amazement. "AI1 very

simple—quite elementary, in fact. I won't even bother to tell you how I know—just little things here and there about the room. Here's one of them," he said, as he picked up a rusty pen point from the desk. "That shows she uses a stub, of course; but the way the point is worn also proves that she's left handed. And here's another." He pointed to the electric bulb which hung over the head of the bed. "Nobody would use that light, except to read by in bed. The others in the room are more than sufficient for purposes of illumination. Yet the lamp has been used continuously, as its condition shows. See how blackened the glass is—and notice also how the white enamel of the back of the bed is worn off, just under the lamp. That's from propping a pillow against it, night after night." He turned toward the door. "Of course, those things aren't of any value, probably, in this case; but I can't help noticing them. Force of habit, I suppose."

When Duvall arrived at the Stapleton house on Saturday morning, he found the banker somewhat disturbed by a cablegram he had just received. "Mary claims attempts made to poison her. Will recover. Come at once," it read.

The detective appeared to be somewhat astonished, on reading the cablegram. "Looks as though somebody was afraid she might be going to talk," he remarked. "The sooner we arrive in Paris, now, the better."

CHAPTER III

GRACE DUVALUS first inclination, on finding herself en route for Europe, without her husband, was to send him a wireless, advising him of her movements. Then she decided, for several reasons, not to do so. Chief among these was the fear that such a startling piece of news would be likely to cause him a great deal of unnecessary anxiety. She knew that she could never hope to explain matters, within the limits of a marconigram. And then, too, it was highly inadvisable, she knew, to mention in a wireless message the real reason which had caused her to leave home.

So she decided to make the best of the matter, realizing that within a few days, she would see Richard in Paris, and explain everything to his satisfaction.

Immediately on reaching Paris, she drove to the office of the Prefect of Police, and sent in her card to Monsieur Lefevre. She thought it possible that he would expect her, as his agent in Washington would no doubt have communicated with him. Nor was she mistaken.

He rushed into the anteroom as soon as he received her card, and embraced her with true Gallic fervor, kissing her on both cheeks until she blushed. Then he drew her into his private office.

“Where is your husband?” he asked, eagerly, as soon as Grace was seated.

“I—I do not know. Probably on his way to Paris.”

“But—my dear child! Did he not then come with you?”

“No. He—he had other business.”

“Other business! But I understood that he had temporarily retired.” The Prefect seemed greatly astonished.

“So he had; but an old friend, Mr. Stapleton”—

Lefevre did not allow her to finish. “Stapleton!” he fairly shouted. “He is employed by him? Mon Dieu!”

“Why not?” asked Grace in surprise.

“But—it was for that very case that I desired his assistance. And by this Stapleton, who cables that the whole police force of Paris are a lot of jumping jacks! Sacre! It is insufferable!”

“You wanted my husband for the same case?”

“Assuredly! What else? The child of this pig of a millionaire is stolen—what you call—kidnapped! We have been unable to find the slightest clue. I am in despair. My men assure me that it is the work of an American gang. I conceive the hope that Monsieur Duvall may know these men—that he may be in possession of information that will lead to their capture. This rich American, he has spoken with contempt of the Paris police. The efficiency of my office is questioned. My honor is at stake. I send for my friend Duvall, to assist me, and —sacre!—I find him already working for this man who has insulted me. It is monstrous!”

Grace could scarcely repress a smile. How excessively French the Prefect was, after all. “My husband did not know, when he agreed to take the case for Mr. Stapleton, that you wanted him. He does not know it now. He has not yet received your message.”

“Then he does not know that you are in Paris?”

“No. I thought he would be crossing on the same boat. When I found that he wasn’t, my first thought was to send him a wireless. Then I realized that I couldn’t do so, without saying something about the business that had called me to Paris—without, in fact, mentioning you. I feared to do this—for there are so many people nowadays tapping the wireless. I thought it better to keep the matter a secret.”

“And you did quite right. I wanted your husband to take up this case, quite independently, and without it being known to anyone that he was in my employ.” He paused for a moment in deep thought. “No doubt his employment by Mr-Stapleton is to be kept equally secret.”

“I suppose so. He asked me not to say anything about it. I had to tell you, to explain matters.”

“And he doesn’t know that you are in Paris?” The Prefect gave a sudden laugh. “Ma foil—what a joke!”

“A joke?”

“Assuredly! Don’t you see? I am going to ask you to take up this case, yourself. I must use every means to recover the child of this Stapleton, before others do so for him. My professional pride will not permit me to be beaten. If I can’t have your husband, at least I shall have you.”

“But—I shall be working in opposition to him.”

“Not in opposition, You will both have the same object in view—the recovery of Mr. Stapleton’s boy. Whichever of you does so first, the result will be the same—the boy will be restored to his parents. But I want you, my child, to be the one to do this.”

“But, Monsieur Lefevre, I could not hope to accomplish anything—where trained men have failed.”

“Who knows? I remember well the assistance you gave us, in the matter of the ivory snuff box. Without your help, we should never have recovered it. I have faith in a woman’s intuition. You will find this child for me, and give your husband the surprise of his life.”

“But,” said Grace, smiling mischievously at the prospect which opened before her, “suppose he should see me?”

“You must disguise yourself somewhat. Change the color of your hair; it is easily done—here in Paris.” The Prefect laughed. “A slight alteration in appearance only will be necessary. And do not recognize your husband, should you meet him face to face. That is most important.”

“Why?”

“Because, should he become convinced that it is really you, I fear he would insist upon your dropping the case entirely, and that would not suit my plans at all. Come, my child.” The Prefect’s eyes twinkled with amusement. “Do this thing for me. It will be a little joke, between us. The honeymoon detectives, I called you, once. What an amusing thing, that now you should be working in

competition with each other, on the same ease!" He began to laugh heartily.

"Well," said Grace, her sense of mischief getting the better of her, "now that I'm here, I suppose I might as well keep busy. Richard won't be here for two days, and I may find out something in that time."

"Excellent!" The Prefect clapped his hand smartly upon his knee. "You have two days' start. In two days, much may be accomplished. Come, let us go over the case in detail."

An hour later, Grace left the Prefect's office in a taxicab, having arranged to have her baggage sent to Monsieur Lefevre's house, where she was to stay while in Paris. Her previous acquaintance with Madame Lefevre made this an ideal arrangement. She was to pose as a friend, in Paris on a visit.

She ordered the driver of the taxicab to take her to Mr. Stapleton's house in the Avenue Kleber.

She found Mrs. Stapleton to be a very pretty and stylish woman of thirty; whose beauty, however, was sadly marred by the intense suffering through which she was passing. The poor creature had scarcely slept for over a week, and her distress was pitiable.

She answered Grace's questions as well as she could, under the circumstances. There was, after all, little to say. The nurse, it appeared, stuck to her story—that the boy had vanished, in the twinkling of an eye, while her back had been turned for but a few moments. Mrs. Stapleton could offer no explanation—attempted none.

"It is all so mysterious—so terrible!" she cried. "Poor Mary—she is too ill to see you, I fear, or I would have her tell you the story herself."

"Too ill?" inquired Grace, who had come more to question the maid, than Mrs. Stapleton. "What is the matter with her?"

"They tried to poison her—last Friday."

"They? Who?"

"I do not know. She went out for a walk. The poor woman was half dead, from

nervous exhaustion and loss of sleep. She tells me that she stopped to get a cup of chocolate at a cafe in the Rue St. Honore. After that she came back to the Champs Elysees, and sat upon a bench. She began suddenly to feel deathly ill, and, calling a cab, was driven home. When she arrived here, she was unconscious, and had to be carried to her room by the servants. She has been in bed ever since. I am glad to say, however, that she is better, and I think she could see you, by morning."

Grace left the Stapleton house, feeling somewhat baffled. The more she heard of this curious affair, the more inexplicable it seemed. She had hoped to visit the scene of the kidnapping, in company with the nurse, and examine the spot with her own eyes. This she now realized she could not do until the following day. She was walking in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe, revolving the affair in her mind, when a young man, evidently a Frenchman, of good appearance and not unpleasant face, came up beside her, bowed politely, and in excellent English asked hef regarding Mary Lanahan.

"Miss Lanahan—is she better?" he inquired.

"Who are you, monsieur?" asked Grace, suppressing her inclination to resent the man's action, in her hope that she might learn something from, him of value. His question showed Grace at once that he was acquainted with at least one member of the Stapleton household.

"I am a friend of Miss Lanahan's," the man replied. '1 hear that she is ill. I saw you enter and leave the house, and I ventured to ask you if she is better."

"I was told that she is. I did not see her."

A peculiar expression crossed the young man's face; but Grace could not determine, so fleeting was it, whether it indicated pleasure or disappointment.

They walked along in silence for a few moments, and had almost reached the arch, when a ragged little urchin, a veritable Paris gamin, came up to Grace's companion and thrust a crumpled bit of paper into his hand, then darted off, whistling shrilly.

The man looked after him a moment, then examined the note. Whatever its contents, they made a startling impression upon him. He looked about, an expression of fear upon his face, turned to Grace with a hurried bow, and a quick

good evening, and at once walked off in the opposite direction at full speed, at the same time fumbling in the breast pocket of his coat, as though searching for something in it. In his efforts, he dropped several papers to the street. Grace watched him as he picked them hurriedly up and moved off into the gathering darkness.

She fancied that one of the bits of paper had escaped his notice, and, on going back to the spot, found that she was correct. A small visiting card lay upon the sidewalk. She picked it up, and read the name as she walked away. It was Alphonse Valentin, Boulevard St. Michel.

Grace slipped the card into her pocketbook. The man's name meant nothing to her—she fancied that he was some friend of Miss Lanahan's, concerned about her condition. Yet why did he not inquire for her at the house, in the ordinary way? And why should the note, handed to him by the street urchin, have caused him such evident alarm?

She glanced at her watch, and saw that it was close to seven o'clock. She had intended to return to Monsieur Lefevre's for dinner; but a sudden determination to find out more about this man Valentin caused her to proceed at once to a hotel near the Louvre, where she ate her dinner alone.

An hour later she descended from a cab at the number on the Boulevard St. Michel, which was inscribed upon Alphonse Valentin's card.

The place was a dingy old building, the main floor of which was occupied by a dealer in cheese. A narrow doorway at one side gave access to the upper floors. Grace rang the bell, and waited in some trepidation. This going about Paris at night was rather an unusual experience. She thought of the simple joys of her life at home, and for a moment regretted that she had not stayed there. The opening of the door interrupted her thoughts.

The woman who stood in the hallway regarded her without particular interest, and inquired her business. "I wish to see Monsieur Valentin," said Grace.

"He is not in."

"Then I will wait. I must see him. He expects me."

The woman shrugged her shoulders. "As you wish, mademoiselle. Come this

way.” She led Grace up a flight of stairs, and indicated a door at the rear of the upper hall. “That is Monsieur Valentin’s room.” Then she turned away, apparently quite indifferent as to whether Grace entered or not.

The latter placed her hand on the knob of the door, and slowly pushed it open. The room was dark; but the light from the rear windows rendered the objects within it faintly visible. Upon the table stood a lamp. With some difficulty the girl succeeded in finding a match, and lit it.

The light of the lamp disclosed a rather large room with a small alcove in the rear, containing a bed. The alcove was curtained off from the main room. Grace, however, did not spend much time in examining her surroundings. A photograph on the table at once attracted her attention —not because it represented anyone she knew, but because, across the bottom of it, was inscribed, in a feminine hand, “Mary Lanahan.”

She had just completed her examination of the photograph, when two other objects attracted her attention. One was a crumpled bit of paper, upon which a few words were scrawled in lead-pencil. They were, “I am suspicious of Fran�ois. Watch him. The note was unsigned.

The third object upon the table which caught Grace’s attention was a box of cigarettes, open, and nearly full. They were small gold-tipped affairs, of the kind generally used by women, and it was this peculiarity that at first attracted her attention. She thought it strange, that a man should use such cigarettes. She looked at the box, and observed that they were of American make.

Idly she took up one of the cigarettes, and held it in her fingers. She read the name of the brand, printed upon the paper wrapper, and was about e inside he made without hesitation for the table, picked up the box of cigarettes and thrust it into his pocket to drop it back into the box, when she heard a curious rasping noise outside one of the rear windows. It sounded as though someone were climbing the wall of the house. Instinctively she shrank back and concealed herself behind one of the curtains which hung before the alcove door.

The rasping and scraping continued for some little time, and presently Grace, peering through the space between the curtains, saw a face appear at one of the windows. It was a determined face, heavily bearded, dark, evil looking. Its gleaming eyes swept the room with cautious care, then, evidently satisfied that it

was unoccupied, their owner began noiselessly to raise the sash of the window.

It was slow work. Several minutes passed before the man succeeded in raising the sash sufficiently to permit him to crawl into the room. Once inside, he made without hesitation for the table, glanced over its contents, picked up the box of cigarettes and thrust it into his pocket, and then, without paying the least attention to anything else, walked quickly to the door of the room and passed out into the hall.

The girl waited for a moment, then stepped into the light. As she did so, she realized that she held in her hand one of the gold-tipped cigarettes she had taken from the box. She quickly thrust it into her pocketbook, and, with sudden decision, left the room and descended the stairs. She had an instinctive feeling that the man who had stolen the cigarettes was in some way connected with the kidnapping of the Stapleton child. She determined to follow him, leaving the interview with Alphonse Valentin to another time.

She left the house, and saw the man going down the Boulevard some fifty feet in advance of her. She walked along after him, pretending to be totally uninterested in her surroundings, while at the same time keeping a sharp watch upon him.

He seemed in somewhat of a hurry, and walked briskly along, looking neither to left nor to right. Grace kept as close to him as she dared, without running the risk of detection. The walk was a long one. When half an hour had passed, the girl saw that they were entering the Champs Elysees. The Seine they had long since crossed by the Pont Neuf. Up the brilliantly lighted avenue they went, toward Arc de Triomphe. At the comer of the Avenue Kleber, the man turned to the left. Grace followed, wondering where the chase would lead next. To her astonishment, the man disappeared suddenly through a gate which formed the servants' entrance of one of the stately houses which fronted on the avenue. She looked up. It was the house of Mr. Stapleton!

CHAPTER IV

ON the day following that upon which she arrived in Paris, Grace Duvall sallied forth, determined to find out two things—first, the position occupied by Alphonse Valentin in the aSair of the kidnapping; secondly, the identity of the man who had stolen the box of cigarettes from Valentin's room, and gone with them to the house in the Avenue Kleber. The latter incident seemed trivial enough, at first sight; yet she reasoned that no one would risk arrest on the score of burglary, to steal anything of such trifling value, without an excellent reason.

She had a short conference with Monsieur Lefevre, before she left the house, and told him of the events of the previous night. The Prefect seemed greatly interested.

"Could you identify the man who stole the cigarettes?" he asked.

"Easily. I had a splendid view of his face."

"Then go to Mr. Stapleton's house and take a look at all the servants. You may find him among them."

"I had intended to do so, this morning."

The Prefect smiled. "I do not know what your investigations will lead to, but they seem promising. I have a dozen men working on the case; yet so far they have not made the least progress. Their efforts, however, are directed toward finding the child. They are searching the city with the utmost care. We believe that by discovering the missing boy, we shall also find the persons who committed the crime."

"Have you no one under suspicion?" '

"No one. The nurse, Mary Lanahan, is of course being closely watched; also the chauffeur, Fran�ois. My men report, however, that he gave them the slip for an hour, last night. I have an idea that he may prove to be the one who took the cigarettes."

"Can you imagine any reason for his having done so?"

“I confess, my child, that I cannot. It seems utterly absurd; unless, indeed, there was something else concealed in the box.”

“What?”

The Prefect laughed. “I cannot imagine. But if you can identify the man, we shall no doubt find out. As for the matter of Alphonse Valentin, we have already had him under observation. So far as we can learn, he is merely a chauffeur, out of work, who seems to be somewhat in love with the nurse.”

“Then his actions have not been suspicious, during the past week?”

“Not in the least. He has hung around the Stapleton house for several days, asking for news of the Lanahan woman; but that is all. We attribute his actions to a natural anxiety over her illness.”

Grace left the house, by no means satisfied with the progress she was making. Her interview with Mary Lanahan, and subsequent visit to the scene of the crime, told her nothing she had not already known. Her greatest disappointment, however, came when she had Mrs. Stapleton bring in Fran�ois, ostensibly to question him about his part in the affair. She saw at once that he was not the man who had broken into Alphonse Valentin’s room on the night before. This man had been heavily bearded and tall. Fran�ois was smooth shaved and rather short. Mrs. Stapleton assured her that none of her servants resembled in the least her description of the burglar. She left the house, greatly dissatisfied, after satisfying herself that this was the case.

Her visit to the house of Alphonse Valentin that afternoon was productive of no greater results. The man was out. The woman who opened the door—the same one who had admitted her the previous evening—regarded her with ill-concealed suspicion, and informed her that she had no idea when her lodger would return. Grace left, determined to try again the following day.

Throughout the whole evening she hung about the Stapleton house, hoping again to see the man with the heavy beard who had disappeared within the night before; but he did not put in an appearance. Grace began to feel discouraged. She thought of her lilac bushes, at home, of Aunt Lucy feeding the chickens, of the dogs, the sweet call of the wood robins among the poplar trees on the lawn, and half wished that she had stayed at home and left to Richard the apparently hopeless task of finding the abductors of little Jack Stapleton.

What, after all, could she hope to do, where the entire police force of Paris had failed? The thing was absurd. Monsieur Lefevre had overrated her abilities. She heard the sound of church bells, striking the hour of ten, and decided to go home and forget the whole affair until tomorrow. Tomorrow—the day Richard must arrive! How she longed to be with him! This stupid interruption of their honeymoon seemed peculiarly cruel, now that over a week had elapsed since they had seen each other. She wondered if she would meet him, the next day. Then she thought of her changed appearance, of her hair, dyed a jet black, and worn in a new and to her mind unbecoming fashion, of her darkened complexion, her extremely French costume, her heavy veil, and laughed. If Richard did see her, here in Paris, when he fully believed her to be peacefully tending her flower beds at home, he would never believe the evidence of his senses.

She was strolling toward the Champs Elysees, lost in thought, when suddenly she heard the soft throbbing of a high-powered motor car, as it came up the street behind her. She turned and glanced toward it; but the brilliant glare of the electric headlights blinded her. She could see nothing, except that the car was moving very slowly.

Suddenly It stopped, almost abreast of her, and a tall man leaped to the sidewalk. Before she had an opportunity so much as to glance in his direction, he came swiftly up behind her, threw his arm about her neck, and choked her into unconsciousness. Her last sensation was of being lifted bodily into the already moving car, and then the feeling of rapid motion, quickly blotted out by the coming of insensibility.

When she returned to consciousness, it was broad daylight. She lay upon a small wooden bed, in a low-ceilinged little room, the only furniture of which was a small chest of drawers and a chair. Upon this chair sat a large man, his face so thoroughly hidden by a mask that his features were quite unrecognizable. He was regarding her with keen scrutiny.

“Oh—what—where am I?” she gasped.

The man hesitated for a moment, then slowly spoke. “Where you are, mademoiselle, is of no importance. Attend to what I have to say.”

Grace made no reply. There seemed nothing that she could say. She sat up and

gazed at the man, half dazed. Her head swam. She felt that she had been drugged.

“Ten days ago,” the man went on, in a cold and menacing voice, “the child of Monsieur Stapleton was taken from his nurse in the Bois de Boulogne. You are trying to find that child.”

“But—” Grace made a movement of protest.

“It is useless to deny it. You have been watched.”

Grace gasped in silence.

“I desire to send a message to the boy’s father, and I have chosen you to take it to him. I have selected you, because to send one of my own men would doubtless result in his arrest. That is why you have been brought here.”

“The—the child is safe?” asked Grace.

“Perfectly. You shall see for yourself.” He motioned to the window.

Grace rose, and looked out. The view comprised a bit of garden, surrounded by bushes. She could see nothing beyond—nothing that would enable her in any way to identify the place. On the tiny plat of grass in the garden sat a child—a little girl, playing with a small black and white spaniel. Her dark hair was drawn tightly beneath a pink sunbonnet. Her dress, her whole appearance, was that of a peasant child.

Grace turned from the window, bewildered. “I see nothing,” she said, “except a little girl—”

“That is the child of Monsieur Stapleton,” the man said. “Now attend to the message.”

She sat down again, wondering.

“Tell the boy’s father this: He will leave his house tomorrow evening, in his automobile, at eight o’clock. He will bring with him, in a package, the sum of five hundred thousand francs —one hundred thousand dollars. He will have with him, in the automobile, no one but himself and his chauffeur. He will leave Paris

by the Porte de Versailles, and drive along the road to Versailles at a speed of twelve miles an hour. Somewhere upon that road, among the many automobiles that will pass him, will be one, from which a blue light will flash, as it approaches him. It will also slow up. He will toss the package of bank notes into that car, and drive on. If the package contains the sum of five hundred thousand francs, he will find his child at his house, upon his return. If not, or if these instructions are not carried out to the letter—if there is any attempt made at pursuit—the child will not be there, and you can the matter—she and this fellow Valentin?"

"It begins to look like it."

"On what do you base your conclusions, Mr. Duvall? I cannot bring myself to believe that Mary Lanahan is lying, ready as I am to suspect this fellow Valentin."

"First, Mr. Stapleton, on the facts themselves. The boy could not have been taken away without her knowledge. Secondly, upon some minor matters—her error of half an hour, in telling her story, for instance."

"I am sorry, Mr. Duvall, but I cannot believe that you are right. Vd suspect Valentin, at once; but if Mary Lanahan is not telling the truth, then my experience of twenty years in judging human nature has been wasted."

"Yet you yourself heard her admit that she was with Valentin only last Friday, the day she was taken ill."

"Yes. That is true." Mr. Stapleton passed his hand uncertainly across his forehead. "It's too much for me."

"Let me have a word with the nurse, alone, before I go," asked Duvall.

"Certainly," replied the banker. "I'll send her in to you."

When Mary Lanahan entered the room, the detective went up to her and eyed her sternly. "Was Alphonse Valentin with you at any time, in the Bois, that day?"

"No," replied the girl, steadily.

"Does he smoke gold-tipped cigarettes?" asked Duvall, suddenly.

The effect of this question upon the nurse was startling. She recoiled as though the detective had struck her. “He—he does not smoke at all,” she gasped, her face gray with fear.

“Don’t lie to me!”

“He does not smoke at all,” repeated the girl, almost mechanically, and stood confronting him with a defiant air.

“Very well. That is all.” The detective turned from the room and left the house.

He did not, however, go very far. It was rapidly becoming dark. He passed down the street until he judged he was out of sight of the house, then slowly retraced his steps upon the other side, until he had reached a point nearly opposite the small iron gateway which served as the servants’ entrance to Mr. Stapleton’s house.

Here, hidden behind a tree, he watched for perhaps half an hour.

At the expiration of this period, he was rewarded by seeing a young man, evidently an under servant, emerge from the gateway. Duvall watched him as he proceeded down the street, then began to follow him.

The young man seemed in no great hurry, and at the junction of the avenue with the Champs Elysees, Duvall accosted him, speaking in French.

“Do you want to earn twenty francs, my friend?” he asked pleasantly.

The boy regarded him with a quizzical smile. “Who does not, Monsieur?” he replied.

“Let me see the note you have in your hand.”

The boy drew back suddenly, and made as though to thrust the letter into his pocket. “It is impossible, Monsieur.” he began.

Duvall took out a gold twenty-franc piece. “I intend to have the letter, my man. If you will give it to me peaceably, here are the twenty francs; if not, I shall be obliged to take it from you by force.”

The boy regarded the detective for a moment, as though contemplating flight. Duvall seized him by the collar. “Give me the note,” he cried, “or I’ll call a gendarme and have you placed under arrest!”

The boy allowed the letter to drop to the pavement, seized the twenty-franc piece, and took to his heels.

Duvall picked it up. As he had expected, it was addressed to Alphonse Valentin, Boulevard St. Michel. He had waited, on the chance that Mary Lanahan would lose no time in warning her probable confederate.

The letter gave him the man’s address. That was so much accomplished, at least. Then he tore it open, and read the contents. They proved more mystifying than anything that he had yet encountered in this mysterious affair.

“Destroy the cigarettes!” These three words comprised the entire contents of the note.

CHAPTER VI

ALPHONSE VALENTIN came up to Grace and took her roughly by the arm. “Come with me,” he said, and started up the street.

At first she felt inclined to resist him. A signal to a passing gendarme, and she could have had the man placed under arrest. Monsieur Lefevre had taken care to provide her with credentials that would insure her obtaining instant assistance from any member of the police.

Then another thought came to her. This man Valentin she very much desired to see. His position, clinging to the rear of the automobile, indicated that he was in all probability not a confederate of the kidnappers. Just what he was, she could not imagine. She determined to go along with him, and hear what he had to say.

A few minutes’ walk brought them to the man’s lodgings. For some reason, which she did not understand, the automobile in which she had been a prisoner had stopped on the Boulevard St. Michel within a short distance of Valentin’s rooms.

When they reached the house, Valentin, instead of opening the door with a key, rang the bell. The woman who had previously admitted Grace came to the door, Valentin nodded.

“Is this the woman?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the landlady, recognizing her at once. “This is the one.”

“Good!” Valentin closed the door and led the way to his room. Grace followed, wondering what the man intended to do.

“Why have you come here twice during the past two days?” he asked, abruptly, after he had lit the lamp and carefully shut the door.

Grace determined to be quite frank with him. “I wanted to ask you some questions, Monsieur Valentin,” she replied.

“Ha! You know my name?”

“Certainly.”

He appeared somewhat uneasy. “What are you up to?”

“I am trying to find Mr. Stapleton’s child.”

A queer smile came over the fellow’s face. “Is that why you stole the cigarettes?” he asked.

“I did not steal them. They were taken by a man with a black beard, who came in through the window when I was here.”

“A black beard?” He smiled incredulously. “And you let him take them.”

“Yes. Why not? Were they of such great value?”

He glanced about uneasily, but did not reply to her question. “Who was the man?” he presently asked.

“I do not know. I followed him. He entered Mr. Stapleton’s house.”

“Sacre! It must have been Fran�ois!”

“Hardly. Fran�ois has no beard.”

“But he might have been disguised.” He seemed very much perturbed. “What a pity I was so careless!”

“Monsieur Valentin, will you please tell me what those cigarettes have to do with the kidnapping of Mr. Stapleton’s child?”

He looked at her closely for a moment. “Everything,” he answered gloomily, “and—nothing. I was a fool to have left them here.”

Grace began to feel more and more composed. This man did not talk like one of the band of criminals’. “Do you know where the child is?” she suddenly asked.

“Perhaps.” He observed her narrowly. “Do you?”

“No. If I did, I should restore him to his poor mother.”

“What were you doing in that automobile?”

“I was a prisoner. And you?”

Again he evaded her question. “It is my own affair,” he growled.

“Did you not see who it was that drove the car?” she asked.

Instead of replying, he flung himself into a chair. “Sit down. Mademoiselle, and tell me the whole story. If I find that you are frank with me, I promise to be equally so with you.”

Suddenly Grace felt an intuition that the man was honest. She determined to do as he asked. “Very well. I will tell you the truth. I am trying to recover Mr. Stapleton’s child. Last night I was watching the house. I was seized from behind, thrown into an automobile, and taken—I do not know where. This morning a message to Mr. Stapleton was given me. Tonight I was brought here, blindfolded, in an automobile. Then I met you. That is all I know.”

Valentin appeared disappointed. “Then you do not know where the child is?” he asked.

“The child is where I was—I saw it.”

As Grace said this, her companion leaped excitedly from his chair. “Then we have them!” he cried.

“I do not understand.”

“Mademoiselle, this evening I was watching Monsieur Stapleton’s house. Like yourself, I desire to recover the child. I saw Fran�ois leave in Monsieur Stapleton’s automobile. I climbed in behind, as he left the house. It was dark. He did not see me. He drove out toward Versailles.”

“Toward Versailles?” exclaimed Grace.

“Yes. Why do you seem so surprised.”

“Never mind. Go on.”

“After a time, he stopped by the roadside. I got out, and hid in the shadow of some trees. Presently you were brought, blindfolded, by a man, who entered the car with you. When it again started, I climbed on behind. That is how I came to meet you.”

“Then you don’t know where the house is, from which I was brought?”

“No. There are many houses—all about. There was no way of knowing, in the dark. Did you come far—when they brought you to the automobile?”

“Yes. Several hundred yards, at least. But you know the spot, on the roadside?”

“Yes. I can find it, without difficulty.”

“Monsieur Valentin, I have a plan—a very dangerous plan—for recovering Mr. Stapleton’s boy. I cannot tell you what it is now. Tomorrow I will tell you—tomorrow afternoon. I shall want your assistance.”

“What am I to do?”

“Can you drive an automobile?”

The man smiled. “Decidedly. It is my profession.”

“Splendid! You will wait for me here, and I will come, and tell you what you are to do. I shall arrive not later than six o’clock.” She rose. “Now I must go; but before I do so, tell me one thing. What is the mystery of the gold-tipped cigarettes?”

Her question seemed to drive from Valentin’s face all the good nature that had dwelt there the moment before. “I cannot tell you that,” he growled. “You must not ask me. Let me advise you to drop the matter of the cigarettes, and report your message to Mr. Stapleton at once.”

For a moment, Grace almost regretted her frankness. Suppose, after all, he should prove to be but a confederate of the kidnappers, in league with Mary Lanahan, the nurse, to spirit the boy away in the first place, and now sent by them, in the guise of a spy clinging to the rear of the automobile, to find out what step she proposed to take to capture them? She paused in indecision. Suddenly there was a tapping upon the door of the room.

Valentin went to the door and cautiously opened it. The landlady stood on the landing outside. “There is a man to see you, at the door below, Monsieur,” she said in a low tone.

“Who is it?”

“I do not know. He gives the name of Victor Girard.”

“Very well. Send him up.”

Grace heard the name—Victor Girard. A sudden wave of weakness swept over her. It was Richard! He had used the name frequently, in the past. She heard him ascending the short flight of stairs. There was no escape. Yet Monsieur Lefevre particularly insisted that he should not recognize her. She hastily drew down her veil. “Get rid of him as soon as you can,” she whispered to Valentin, and shrunk back into the shadow.

Duvall came in, glancing sharply about him. He had been waiting to see Valentin since early in the evening, and had inquired for him twice before, only to find that he was out.

“What can I do for you, Monsieur?” inquired Valentin.

The detective drew the note from his pocket —the note which Mary Lanahan had sent to Valentin, and which Duvall had intercepted. “This is for you, Monsieur?” he asked, then suddenly paused, astounded. In the dim light, he caught sight of Grace, standing on the opposite side of the room, watching him closely. “I—I thought —Monsieur—I thought you were alone,” he gasped, his eyes fixed on Grace as though he had seen a ghost. “I—I beg your pardon, but —” He was unable to proceed.

Valentin looked at him in amazement. “What is it, my friend?” he asked sharply. “Tell me your business, if you please, and go. I have a visitor.”

“Yes—Monsieur—so—so I see.” Duvall pulled himself together with a mighty effort and turned his glance to Valentin. He had suffered a great shock. For a moment he would have been ready to swear that Grace, his dear wife, stood before him in the flesh—and yet the thing was an absurdity: Grace, with her golden brown hair, her clear complexion, was three thousand miles away! This woman, dark, typically French, was quite evidently an entirely different person;

yet the resemblance was startling—he felt himself shaking in every fiber.

“Well, Monsieur, give me the letter, since you say it is for me,” he heard Valentin saying.

In an instant he had recovered his self possession. “Here,” he exclaimed, handing the note to the man before him. “It is from Mary Lanahan. I have read it.”

“You have read it, Monsieur!” Valentin exclaimed, angrily. “By what right, then, do you presume to read my letters?” He took the note and hurriedly read its contents.”

“Sacre!” he exclaimed. “What does this mear?”

“It means, my friend, that I want that box of gold-tipped cigarettes.”

Grace started. So Richard, too, was interested in the recovery of these mysterious cigarettes. What on earth, she wondered, could it mean?

“In the first place, Monsieur, let me inform you that I have no cigarettes, gold-tipped or otherwise. In the second place, I question your right to make any such demands.”

“Does not the note from Mary Lanahan request you to destroy them?”

Valentin turned pale. “I tell you I have no such cigarettes!” he cried.

“Are they not the sort, then, that you usually smoke?”

“I do not smoke at all, Monsieur.”

Duvall laughed. “So you both tell the same story, it seems. My friend, I dislike to discuss these matters before a stranger.” He glanced significantly at Grace.

She dared not go. To speak—even to bid Valentin good evening, would, she felt sure, betray her. So she remained silent.

“Then take yourself off. I certainly have no desire to discuss them. I tell you, I do not smoke —I have no cigarettes—that is enough!”

“What does that note mean, then?” asked Duvall sternly.

“That is Miss Lanahan’s affair—and mine.”

Duvall drew out his pocketbook, and extracted from it the bit of cigarette stump, with the gold tip, which he had found that morning in the Bois de Boulogne. “Monsieur Valentin,” he said, “I found this end of a cigarette at the exact place in the grass, in the Bois de Boulogne, where Mr. Stapleton’s child and nurse were, when the boy was stolen. The chauffeur was asleep. You could readily have walked up, taken away the child, and no one would have been the wiser. The story of Mary Lanahan, that no one came near her, that the boy disappeared into thin air, is absurd. The presence of the half-smoked cigarette, of a kind which I have reason to believe you use, convinces me that you were there in the Bois, with the nurse, at the time of the kidnapping—if indeed you did not take an active part in it. The message from Mary Lanahan, which I have just handed you, directing you to destroy the cigarettes,—which, no doubt, she feared, after my questioning, might be used as evidence against you,—serves as strong additional proof. I believe that you know where Mr. Stapleton’s child is.”

The statements which her husband made convinced Grace that she had made a mistake in confiding in Valentin. She herself had seen the gold-tipped cigarettes on his table—had seen them stolen. It was not very conclusive evidence, she realized; but, taken with the nurse’s letter, it was significant.

Valentin, however, did not appear to be greatly alarmed by the detective’s charges. “You are mistaken, Monsieur,” he said quietly. “I know nothing about the affair.”

“Then what docs this note mean?”

“That I cannot tell you. And, if you have any other questions to ask, I beg that you will come again—at another time. I, as you see, am engaged for the moment.” He indicated Grace with a glance.

Duvall looked about, then turned to the door. His object in coming had been fulfilled. He had seen Valentin—located him—he hoped frightened him. It was one of his theories that a man, frightened by the knowledge that he is being closely pursued, is far more likely to make a false step, than one who fancies himself secure.

He darted a curious glance at Grace, as he left the room; but her face, concealed in the shadow, told him nothing. Her silent presence filled him with strange disquietude. He stationed himself outside the doorway of the house, determined to learn, if possible, who she was, by following her, when she left the place. He had not counted on Valentin's being with her.

The two left the house together, and the man at once called a cab. Into this he put Grace, all the while eying Duvall savagely. The latter gave up all ideas of pursuing Grace, and returned, somewhat disgruntled, to his hotel. He had barely reached it, when a message was brought to him, summoning him to Mr. Stapleton's house.

Grace, meanwhile, had driven at once to the banker's, and delivered to him the message with which she had been intrusted by the man in the black mask that morning.

Mr. Stapleton's face grew more and more angry as she proceeded with her story. He jumped up, as soon as he learned the purport of it, and, ringing up Duvall's hotel, requested the detective to come to him at once. Then he turned to Grace.

"You have no idea where this place is located?"

"Not the slightest."

"You say you saw my boy? He was safe?"

"I saw a child, which I was told was yours, Mr. Stapleton. I did not recognize him, of course. You know I have never seen your son. Also, he was dressed as a girl."

Mr. Stapleton produced a photograph with nervous haste. "Was he like this?" he demanded.

"Yes. It was the same." There was sufficient resemblance, even in the disguise the boy wore, for Grace to be practically certain of his identity.

"How am I to know that these scoundrels will keep their word?" Mr. Stapleton groaned, his head on his hands.

"Do you intend, then, to give them the money?"

“Certainly. Do you suppose I would take any chances, for the matter of a hundred thousand dollars—or twice as much, for that matter? His mother and I are unable to sleep, to eat, to do anything in fact, under the strain of this thing. I shall by all means do as they ask.”

“But they will get away.”

“That is nothing to me. Let them. Once my boy is safe, I can spend another hundred thousand to catch them; but not now—when one false step might mean his death.”

“They won’t harm him, Mr. Stapleton. They are too anxious for the money, to let anything happen to him.”

“I’ll take no chances.”

Grace rose. “Then I might as well be going,” she said. “I don’t see that I can do anything, more. I shall report the matter to the Prefect of Police at once.”

“Very well. And be good enough to say to him that I particularly desire that no steps be taken to prevent the carrying out of the plan. I shall pay this money and regain my boy. After that, the police may do as they like. Good evening.

“Good evening.” Grace left the house, feeling singularly disappointed, in spite of the fact that Mr. Stapleton’s decision apparently meant that Richard’s work in Paris, as well as her own, was likely to be brought to a sudden termination.

As she was leaving the house, she saw Richard drive up in a cab. The sight of him filled her with joy; although she was forced to conceal it, and pass him by with a look of indifference. In the darkness, she knew she was safe. He recognized her of course,—recognized her, that is, as the woman he had seen in Valentin’s room,—and her presence here at Mr. Stapleton’s house evidently filled him with surprise. For a moment, she thought he was about to speak to her, as he descended from his cab; but she turned away and hurried down the street, and when she looked back, he had entered the house.

CHAPTER VII

MR. STAPLETON was standing in the middle of the library, when Duvall entered. He turned to him excitedly.

“Mr. Duvall,” he said, “I have just heard news that I hope will restore my boy to me within the next twenty-four hours!”

“From the woman who just left the house?”

“Yes.”

“Who is she?”

“An agent of the police.”

“Ah! Are you certain of that?”

“I know only what she says.”

Duvall looked at him curiously. “What is the news she has brought you?”

“A message from the scoundrels who have stolen the child. They want a hundred thousand dollars, to return him.”

“And she brought you that message?”

“Yes.” The banker regarded his questioner uneasily.

“Does it not seem rather singular, Mr. Stapleton, that a member of the Paris police should come to you with a message from the kidnap—

Mr. Stapleton frowned. “I had not considered that aspect of the case, Mr. Duvall. I was—and am—too anxious to get my boy back, to care by whom these fellows deliver their terms.”

“What was the message, Mr. Stapleton?”

“I am to drive along the road to Versailles tomorrow evening, leaving here at

eight o’clock, and moving at the rate of twelve miles an hour. Somewhere on that road, an automobile in passing will signal me with a blue light. I am then to slow up and toss into the other machine a package containing one hundred thousand dollars. If I do this, and make no attempt to follow or capture the rascals, they agree to deliver the child here—at my house—by the time I return home.”

Duvall listened to Mr. Stapleton’s words with growing interest. “They are a shrewd lot,” he exclaimed. “They will get away in their machine, and have ample opportunity to examine the package to see that it contains the amount they demand. By signaling to confederates at any point along the road, or in another automobile, they can advise them whether or not to return the child.”

“But how will they be able to do this, without running the risk of being caught?”

“That is easy. They take the boy to Paris, employ a passerby—a man of their own class, no doubt—for a few francs, to deliver him at your door. To trace them, through that means, will be impossible. If you give them the money, the chances are that they will never be caught.”

“Nevertheless, I shall give it to them.”

“I expected that, Mr. Stapleton. I can understand your feelings. It is not right, of course, to submit to this blackmail; but no doubt, were I situated as you are, I would do the same thing. Still, it is a great pity.”

“Why?”

“Because we have an excellent chance to capture these fellows.”

“And lose the boy!”

“Yes, that might be true. Such men are apt to retaliate very promptly, and very severely. They have no pity. I wish I might handle the case to suit myself.”

“What would you do?”

“I would arrange to follow you, in a fast car, keeping say five hundred feet in the rear. I should have several men, well armed, in the car. By watching carefully, with field glasses if necessary, I would observe the car which signaled you with

the blue light. When this car passed me, I would follow, but make no move which would alarm the kidnappers until they had given the signal—whatever it is—that would ensure your boy being returned to you. Then I would close in on them, and arrest them."

"Your plan, Mr. Duvall, is open to serious objections. Suppose these men, undoubtedly on the watch, observe that they are being followed. They will give no signal—and I will lose not only my child, but the one hundred thousand dollars as well. No, no, I want no interference in the matter whatever."

Duvall remained a moment in silence. "Very well, Mr. Stapleton, I am under your orders, of course. But I dislike very much to see these fellows get away."

"So do I; but there's no help for it."

"If I can work out a plan for their capture, which will not involve the loss of the boy, you are willing, I take it, to let me go ahead?"

"Yes J but I insist that you first submit the plan to me."

"Very well. And now, another matter. This woman who brought the message to you is, you say, an agent of the police. Did she attempt to explain how she came by the message?"

"Yes. She was forcibly abducted, last night, carried a long distance out into the country, and the instructions given her. She was brought back to Paris, blindfolded, tonight."

"Mr. Stapleton, what would you say were I to tell you that less than an hour ago I saw this woman in the rooms of Alphonse Valentin, a man whom I suspect to be very deeply concerned in the kidnapping of your son?"

Stapleton started. "Is it possible?" he said. "Have you any idea what she was doing there?"

"No. They seemed on excellent terms, however. Of course, it is not impossible that an agent of the police might pose as a friend of one of the criminals, and thus obtain information. But it looks decidedly queer."

"It does, indeed. Still, as I said before, if I get my boy back, I shall be satisfied."

He took a turn about the room, chewing nervously upon his long black cigar. “Now, Mr. Duvall, what is your plan to capture these fellows?”

Duvall sat in deep thought for sometime. “It is not an easy matter, Mr. Stapleton, but there is one way which promises success, and that, too, without interfering with your arrangements to recover your boy.”

“What is it?”

“This. It is necessary for us, in some way, to identify the tar which gives you the signal of the blue light. It will pass close to you, at a moderate speed. I want you to mark that car, so that it may be recognized at once.”

“How can I do that?”

“I will place in the bottom of your machine a small device, consisting of a rubber bulb, equipped with a small nozzle, projecting through a hole in the body of the car. The bulb will be filled with indelible red stain. When you stand up, to toss the package of money to the kidnappers, you must press this bulb with your foot. The two cars will then be side by side. The pressure on the bulb will discharge a blast of the red stain against the body and wheels of the car opposite you. It will then be a simple matter to identify it.”

“Yes—yes. I see that. But what then?”

“The car, in passing you, will be headed for Paris. Undoubtedly it is the intention of these fellows to enter the city. I shall station myself at the Porte de Versailles, and I will arrange to have other men, members of the detective bureau, stationed at the neighboring gates in the fortifications. All cars entering the city will be momentarily halted. The one which bears upon its body or wheels the red stain will be seized, its occupants arrested.”

“But suppose they have not yet notified their confederates to return the boy to me?”

“In that event, I feel certain that the child will be found in the automobile with them. Look at the thing as you would, were you in their place. They are forced to act with great quickness. Were they to signal, by lights or otherwise, to persons along the road, they could hardly hope to get the boy to your house before you yourself return there. They know you will return home immediately at your best

speed as soon as you have delivered the money to them. What more likely, then, that they will have the boy with them in the car, will drive to some prearranged point in Paris, and deliver him to the person who will bring him to your house? That would seem to my mind, their most probable plan."

"And if not—if the child is not with them?"

"Then there are but two courses open to them. The first is to signal, by lights or otherwise, to their confederates, before they enter Paris. If they do this, the boy will be returned to you, and we will capture the men as well. The only other alternative, of course, is for them to notify their confederates after they enter Paris."

"But, if you arrest him at the barrier, they cannot do that, and my boy will not be sent back."

"That is true; but I do not think they will wait to notify their confederates until after they enter Paris."

"Why not, Mr. Duvall?"

"First, because of the danger of being 'observed, in the crowded streets of the city. Secondly, because I do not think the child is in Paris at all. The woman who brought you the message from the kidnappers, I understand, saw the child at a point some distance in the country. It seems unlikely that these men would run the risk of conveying the child into the city, in broad daylight. By having the boy with them in the car, they avoid all danger of signaling anybody. They merely inspect the package of money, run into Paris, fully believing themselves for the time being safe, drop the child at a convenient point, divide the plunder, and scatter to their respective hiding places. Criminals of this sort know perfectly well that they are far safer, hiding in a big city, than fleeing through the country in an automobile. I feel scarcely any doubt that they have the child with them."

"But if he is still in the country, and they wait until after they are in Paris before notifying their confederates?"

"Then the latter are obliged to journey a long distance out into the country, get the child, and bring him back to your house. That would require a considerable period. They could not possibly do it before you return home."

Mr. Stapleton considered the matter for a long time in silence. “Your arguments seem sound, Mr. Duvall,” he presently observed. “Like yourself, I am anxious to capture these fellows. It makes my blood boll, to think of their getting away. Of course, your deductions may be wrong.”

“Then at least we will get the perpetrators of the crime, and it is most likely that one of them, at least, may be persuaded to turn state’s evidence, and disclose the whereabouts of your son.”

Mr. Stapleton pondered the matter with great care. Evidently he feared any course of action which did not insure the return of the child.

“It seems to me, Mr. Stapleton,” the detective went on, “that you owe it to the public to let me make this effort to capture these fellows. It is a grave danger to the community, to have such rogues at large. Let me try my plan. Even if it fails, you are no worse off than you are now. The attempt cannot in any way be traced to you.”

“Very well,” said the banker, nervously. “It is a chance–that’s all. However, since it seems to involve no breach of faith on my part, I am willing to take it.”

“Good! I will bring the device I spoke of to your house tomorrow, and attach it to your car. Your man Fran�ois will drive you, I presume.”

“Yes.”

“You trust him?”

“I have no reasons for not doing so. And besides he will know nothing of the affair. His part will be merely to drive the car, as I direct him.”

Duvall thought for a moment. “You will not, of course, give him his instructions until the last moment—just before you start.”

“No. That will be best, I think.”

“Undoubtedly. And to avoid any possible interference, I think I had better not attach the identifying device of which I have spoken to your car until late tomorrow afternoon, immediately before you set out. Then, if by any chance your chauffeur is in this plot, he will have no opportunity to give a warning.”

“Very well. I think, however, that your precautions are needless. There has been nothing whatever brought out to connect Fran�ois with this matter.”

“I know; but it is well to be careful. You will leave here tomorrow evening, at eight o’clock?”

“Yes. Promptly at eight.”

“You might do well to have someone with you, some member of the police, perhaps.”

“The instructions expressly forbid it.”

“Ah—I see. These fellows are shrewd.” He took up his hat. “Until tomorrow then. Good night.”

“Good night.”

CHAPTER VIII

AT the same hour that Richard Duvall was arranging with Mr. Stapleton his plan for the capture of the kidnappers the following day, Grace was closeted with Monsieur Lefevre, the Prefect of Police, in the latter's library, going over the affair in all its details. The Prefect was speaking, ticking off on his fingers the points in the case as he proceeded.

"First, we have the impossible story of the nurse, Mary Lanahan. She seems to be telling the truth; yet I believe she is lying. In my opinion, she is deeply concerned in the whole matter."

"But what about the attempt to poison her?"

"It is highly probable that she poisoned herself, taking a slight dose only. This would divert suspicion from hen"

"I see."

"Then we have the case of Alphonse Valentin, and the mysterious gold-tipped cigarettes. Your husband, Monsieur Duvall, I am Informed, has found one of these cigarettes, partly smoked, on the grass at the scene of the crime. This might indicate that Valentin was there, with her, on some occasion, but not necessarily on the day the kidnapping occurred. It might readily have been the day before—or the week before, for that matter."

"I thought of that," remarked Grace, quietly. "It seems to me that Richard attached too much importance to the matter."

"That remains to be seen. Now, supposing Valentin to be concerned, with the nurse, in the plot. He of course does not think, at the start, that the possession of the cigarettes would involve him in the affair, because he does not know that Monsieur Duvall has found the one in the grass. Your husband, however, asks Mary Lanahan what kind of cigarettes Valentin smokes. She at once becomes suspicious, and at the first opportunity warns Valentin, by letter, to destroy them. That shows clearly that they are working together."

"Undoubtedly. But meanwhile the cigarettes are stolen from Valentin's room by

a man with a dark beard, who subsequently enters Mr. Stapleton's house. For that, I confess, I can find no explanation."

"Nor L The destruction of the cigarettes could be of no importance to anyone, except to the kidnappers themselves. It is of course possible that someone else in Mr. Stapletons house—Fran�ois, for instance—is concerned in the plot."

"But the man who took the cigarettes had a black beard, while Fran�ois is smooth shaven."

"I know. But it might have been a disguise."

"I do not think so. The man I saw was taller than Fran�ois, and not so heavily built."

The Prefect considered the matter for a moment. "You are certain that he entered the Stapleton's house?"

"Absolutely certain. I saw the gate close behind him."

"Then I can only say that, so far, the matter is inexplicable. Now let us come back to Valentin. He claims to be working to capture the kidnappers—in order to clear the nurse, whom he loves."

"That is as I understand it."

"He denies that he smokes, yet offers no explanation of the presence of the cigarettes in his room."

"None. Further, someone sends a note to Valentin, advising him that the writer is suspicious of Fran�ois—suggesting that he watch him. Can this mean that Fran�ois is in the plot, and they fear he may be weakening—preparing to turn against them?"

"It certainly looks that way."

"I wish I could see one of these famous cigarettes."

Grace laughed suddenly. "Why," she exclaimed, "I have one in my pocketbook. I had quite forgotten it." She opened her purse and took out the slender white

cylinder.

Lefevre examined the thing closely. “An Egyptian cigarette of American make,” he mused. “Expensive, here in Paris, and rarely used, except by Americans.”

“That is true; yet I understand that this man Valentin has lived a great deal in America.”

For a moment the Prefect did not reply. Then a puzzled look crossed his face. “This is a woman’s cigarette,” he exclaimed. “No man would smoke such a thing.” He brought his hand down sharply upon his knee. “My girl, it is not impossible that the child was stolen not by a man at all, but by a woman.”

“A woman, apparently, that both Valentin and the nurse are trying to shield.”

The Prefect sat for a moment buried in thought. Then he glanced at Grace keenly. “It seems to me,” he remarked, in a quiet tone, “that we should endeavor to determine whether or not Mrs. Stapleton is in the habit of using cigarettes.”

“Mrs. Stapleton!” gasped Grace, in amazement.

“Yes. I confess the idea is a new one, to me; but it may prove of interest.”

“But why should the boy’s mother wish to kidnap him?”

“I do not know. There is but one point of significance. During the past week my men have, naturally, questioned Mrs. Stapleton closely as to her movements during the past two or three months. They did this, to determine, if possible, whether the criminals were of Paris, or from some other place, where Mrs. Stapleton may have been, with the child, during the past winter. You know these fellows work in bands, and have their regular field of operations.”

“I see. And where had she been?”

“Monte Carlo!” The Prefect uttered the two words significantly.

Grace was quick to grasp his meaning.

“Then you mean that possibly Mrs. Stapleton may have lost large sums at the gambling tables, and, fearing to tell her husband of her losses, has enlisted the

services of the nurse, and of her friend Valentin, and spirited the child away for a few weeks, in order to get the sum of one hundred thousand dollars from her husband without his knowledge?”

“It is by no means impossible. I would recommend that you investigate the matter thoroughly. If we find that Mrs. Stapleton uses gold-tipped cigarettes of this variety, it may go far toward a solution of the whole affair.”

Grace, remembering Mrs. Stapleton’s grief-stricken appearance, felt that the clue was a very slender one, but determined to follow it up, nevertheless.

“Now,” went on the Prefect, “we come to the sudden and most unexpected appearance of Valentin, clinging to the rear of the automobile that brought you back to Paris tonight.”

“As I have told you, he claims to have clambered into Mr. Stapleton’s car.”

“Driven by Fran�ois?”

“Yes.”

“And you say the man who drove the car had a black beard—the same man, in fact, who broke into Valentin’s room and stole the cigarettes?”

“Yes.”

“Then either Valentin is lying, or the man with the black beard is Fran�ois. Let us look at his story from both sides. If he is telling the truth, then Fran�ois is one of the kidnappers.”

“So it would seem. You are having him watched, you say?”

“Yes. My men report that he did leave the house, in Mr. Stapleton’s automobile tonight, at about nine o’clock. That would seem to agree with Valentin’s story. They also report that he returned about eleven, alone.”

“They did not follow him?”

“No. It is impossible to do so, /m another car, without arousing his suspicion, and putting him on his guard. We do not wish him to know that he is being

watched.”

“But Mr. Stapleton must know where he has been—why the car was out.”

“Yes. We have questioned him. He says the man reported that the gasolene tank was leaking, and that he ordered him to have It repaired at once.”

“And was it repaired?”

The Prefect smiled. “Yes. The car was at a garage in the Boulevard St. Michel from half past nine until half past ten.”

Grace fell back, astonished. “Then Valentin is lying!” she cried.

“So it seems; unless, of course, Fran�ois took out another car from the garage, while his own was being fixed.”

“They would know that at the garage.”

“They deny it. But these fellows all hang together. They would think nothing of protecting a brother chauffeur, in the matter of a little joy ride.”

“Valentin says nothing about this, in his story.”

“He may have omitted it, as an unimportant detail. I mean that he may have slipped into the second car, as he did into the first, without being observed. It was dark of course. He may not have thought it necessary to mention it. All this, of course, is on the assumption that he is telling the truth. Now let us say that he is lying—that the man with the black beard is not Fran�ois, but someone else concerned, with Valentin in the plot. What is the purpose of his tale?”

“I cannot imagine. Can you, Monsieur?”

“No, not immediately. The first contradiction, of course, is this. If Valentin and the man with the black beard are working together, why should the latter have broken into his room to get the cigarettes?”

“There seems no sense to it.”

“Yet he may have realized the danger of the cigarettes being in Valentin’s

possession, and instead of trying to warn him simply came and took them away. It is not a particularly plausible explanation; but let us admit it, for the moment, in order to get ahead with our reasoning. Suppose Valentin, the man with the black beard, and Mary Lanahan, the nurse, to be all working together, either with Mrs. Stapleton, or with outside parties. They have the child safely hidden. They abduct you, and send the message to Mr. Stapleton through you. They do not trust you, knowing, no doubt, that you are an agent of my office. They send Valentin along, on the back of the machine, to pretend to be an enemy of theirs trying, like yourself, to recover the child. He thus gets into your confidence. He advises you to report your message from the kidnappers to Mr. Stapleton at once. He questions you, and learns that you do not know the location of the house where the child is hidden. He then offers to show you as nearly as he can where the house is located. If he is in league with the kidnappers, he will take you, and the men whom tomorrow I shall send with you, to some location miles removed from the actual point where the child is concealed, and you will waste the day in a useless search. Decidedly it would be a clever move on their part."

"It certainly would."

"Further, you told this fellow that you had a plan to capture the scoundrels. You are to acquaint him with that plan, tomorrow afternoon. If you do so, he will no doubt get to the telephone on some pretext and warn his comrades of what you intend to do. I strongly recommend that you put no faith in the fellow whatever."

"Still, you would advise trying to locate the house, as he suggests?"

"Yes, we may be wrong about him. We must leave no stone unturned. And now we come to your interview with Mr. Stapleton. You gave him the message, of course. What did he say?"

"He said that he intended to carry out the instructions I gave him to the letter—pay these fellows their money, and get back the boy."

Monsieur Lefevre uttered an exclamation of anger. "Sacre!" He must not do that! The stupid fellow! He will spoil everything!"

Grace laughed quietly to herself. "Hardly stupid, Monsieur! The poor man is half mad over the boy's loss. He will do anything, to get him back. I can scarcely blame him."

The Prefect held out his hand. “I beg your pardon, my child. You are right. It is perhaps but natural for him to feel as he does. But there are other things at stake, than the recovery of the child. For Monsieur Stapleton to pay over this huge sum to these criminals, and then to allow them to escape, is not only a grave reflection upon the efficiency of the Paris police, but is an injustice to the public as well. If these men are successful in this attempt, they will make others. Other children will be stolen. I cannot permit it. It must be prevented at all costs. These men must be brought to justice.”

“How can you prevent it, Monsieur? Mr. Stapleton is determined.”

“That, my child, is the question. I cannot stop Monsieur Stapleton if he wishes to drive out the road to Versailles and toss a hundred thousand dollars into the first automobile that passes him, showing a blue light.” He rose and began to walk up and down the room.

“I have a plan, Monsieur,” said Grace, quietly. ‘ “What is it, my child?” The Prefect regarded her with an indulgent smile. He was very fond of Grace. He regretted that he had been unable to secure the services of her husband in this case. He knew, from past experience, her cleverness; but he did not believe that in a matter of this sort she would be able to outwit men who were probably among the shrewdest criminals in Paris.

“First,” said Grace, “we will have the location pointed out to us by Valentin thoroughly searched.”

“Assuredly! It will, however, probably result in nothing. Even if Valentin is telling the truth, these fellows will beyond question have moved the child before now to prepare for the work of tomorrow evening.”

“Possibly. At any rate, we will try. After that, I shall want Valentin to drive a motor car for me. He is an accomplished chauffeur.”

“You will take him into your confidence, then?” asked the Prefect, in some alarm.

“No. I shall tell him nothing, except that he is to drive the car, and where.”

“Very well. But be careful. What next?”

Grace leaned over and spoke to the Prefect in low tones for several minutes. He listened to what she said, occasionally smiling, and nodding his head. Presently he brought his hand down sharply upon the table. “Bravo!” he exclaimed. “You were born to be a detective. We will get the kidnappers, the money, and in all probability the child as well. I congratulate you!”

“You think it will work, then?”

“I do not see how it can fail. It is an inspiration. I shall certainly feel very well satisfied indeed, if I can return to Monsieur Stapleton both his child and his money, and at the same time place the kidnappers behind the bars. I could never permit it to be said that the police of Paris would knowingly allow a desperate band of criminals to get away with half a million of francs without lifting a hand to prevent it.” He rose and glanced at his watch. “Come, my child. It is after midnight. You have had a long and exciting day. You had better get some rest.”

Grace rose. “Richard seemed awfully puzzled when he saw me.”

“Did he?” The Prefect laughed mischievously. “Really it is a great joke upon him. To be within a step of his own wife, and not to know her!”

Grace seemed scarcely to appreciate the humor of the situation. “I think it’s a shame,” she said, “Poor Richard. He’ll never forgive me. I really think I ought to tell him.”

Monsieur Lefevre shook his head. “If you do that, my dear child, everything will be spoiled. He will insist upon your dropping the case at once, and that would certainly not be fair to me.”

“But, Monsieur, after all, you really do not need me, with all the clever men you have upon your staff.”

“Who knows? Perhaps you may succeed, where they will fail. I have great faith in the intuition of a woman. And already you. have advanced the case further in forty-eight hours than my men have done in ten days. It was a chance, I will admit, that these rascals should have chosen you to deliver their demands to Monsieur Stapleton. I confess I do not understand their reasons for doing so. They must have known that besides telling your story to him, you would also tell it to me. It may have been sheer bravado on their part—it is a characteristic, I have noted, in many criminals. They seem to glory in defying the police. These

fellows, no doubt, think that they have matters so arranged that capture is impossible. I think we shall give them a little surprise."

He turned to the door, and held it open, allowing Grace to pass into the hall. "Good night, my child," he called out to her, as she began to ascend the stairs. "I think I will smoke one more cigar.

As for Grace, she lay awake a long time, thinking of Richard, of their home in the country, of the happy hours they had spent there—before this unexpected interruption to their honeymoon. It seemed very queer to her, to be lying there, alone. She had not gotten used to it. And somewhere, in this big city, Richard was also sleeping—and she not with him! The excitement of the affair was beginning to die out. The meeting with Richard on the boat, which she had planned when she set out from home, had not materialized. She had postponed this meeting, in her thoughts, until his arrival in Paris, and now—he had come, and still she had not been able so much as to touch his hand. She finally went to sleep, devoutly praying that tomorrow, and the capture of the kidnappers, would mark the end of their needless and cruel separation.

CHAPTER IX

PROMPTLY at eight o’clock the next evening Mr. John Stapleton left his house in the Avenue Kleber, in a big French touring car, with Fran�ois at the wheel.

The car presented no points of peculiarity, being like a thousand others to be seen any evening upon the streets of Paris. It was of large size, high powered, and painted a green so dark as to be almost black.

Mr. Stapleton sat in the tonneau, wearing a dark blue serge suit, and a Panama hat. In his left hand he clutched a small package, about the size of a cigar box. In the package were banknotes amounting to one hundred thousand dollars.

Close beside his right foot lay a rubber bulb, from which a short pipe extended through a hole bored in the side of the car. The end of the pipe held a small brass nozzle. It projected but a short distance beyond the body of the car, and in the dim light of early evening was quite invisible.

Mr. Stapleton told his chauffeur to drive out the road toward Versailles. “I feel like getting some fresh air,” he added. “It’s rather warm, tonight.” Inwardly he was burning up with excitement.

From Paris to Versailles is a matter of some fourteen miles. Mr. Stapleton’s car proceeded slowly. He wanted to run no chances of missing the car with the blue light.

At the Porte de Versailles he paused long enough to see Richard Duvall, standing in the shadow of the gateway. Then he passed outside of Paris.

There were many automobiles and other vehicles on the road. The evening was a pleasant one, and all Paris seemed out taking the air. The majority of the vehicles were coming toward the city. He observed a car, some distance behind him, containing a single occupant, a man of middle age, but paid no attention to it. His eyes were strained to detect in the cars approaching him some evidence of the signal light which was to rouse him to sudden action.

He noticed that Fran�ois, like himself, was carefully scrutinizing each car as it approached them. He wondered if the chauffeur could have any idea of the

purpose of his expedition; but presently dismissed the thought as entirely unlikely, and devoted himself to the passing cars.

He had proceeded perhaps four or five miles beyond the fortifications, when he saw a large car approaching slowly from the direction of Versailles. It contained but two persons, the chauffeur, and a heavily veiled woman.

The chauffeur, who was keenly observing the machine in which Mr. Stapleton sat, began to swerve to the right side of the road, so as to pass as closely to the banker's car as possible. At the same moment there showed through the gathering darkness a brilliant spot of blue light in the tonneau where sat the woman.

Mr. Stapleton was on his feet in an instant. The 'two cars approached each other rapidly. It was necessary for him to act with great quickness. He shifted the package containing the money from his left hand to his right, and a moment later had tossed it lightly into the other car.

He saw at once that it landed safely within, and at the same instant he pressed his foot down hard upon the rubber bulb. In a moment the car with the blue light had swept past, and was disappearing rapidly in the direction of Paris.

Mr. Stapleton leaned forward and addressed Fran&#xfffd;ois in a voice which quivered with excitement. "Drive home at once," he commanded.

In a moment he was following the first car toward the city.

He did not notice, as he swept down the darkening road, the car which had been following him all the way from Paris. It continued on its way toward Versailles. In it were two people. At the wheel sat a man who bore, in the semidarkness, a striking resemblance to Fran&#xfffd;ois, Mr. Stapleton's chauffeur, while in the rear sat a figure, in dark suit and Panama hat, which seemed for all the world like that of the banker himself. Had a casual observer not seen Mr. Stapleton turn back toward Paris, he would have concluded that he was still on his way toward Versailles.

The occupants of this second car also appeared to be keenly watching the various automobiles which passed them, as though expecting some signal, some recognition; yet, in spite of their eager and expectant glances, they seemed doomed to disappointment.

At last Versailles was reached. The elderly man in the tonneau gave a short command, his chauffeur turned the car about, and they began to return to Paris. Nothing further whatever happened on the Versailles road.

Meanwhile, Richard Duvall, at the Porte de Versailles, was carefully scrutinizing the various incoming machines that passed the gate and entered the city. With a brilliant electric searchlight he examined their bodies and wheels, looking always for the telltale red stains which would identify the kidnappers' car. Beside him stood Vernet, one of the Prefect's assistants, with whom Duvall had become well acquainted during his former stay in Paris.

"Well, Monsieur Duvall," remarked the latter, "a most ingenious plan—this of yours. I wonder if it will be successful?"

"I feel sure of it."

"I hope you are right." He looked at his watch. "Half past eight. About time, I should think, from what you tell me. Here is a big fellow, now. A Pasquet, by her looks. Six-cylinder, too."

Duvall glanced at the oncoming car. A wagon which preceded it was just passing the gates. The big Pasquet slowed up, and almost stopped.

The detective threw the rays of his searchlight on the body of the car, then started back with an exclamation. From one end to the other, the dark green finish of the sides and wheels was spattered and streaked with bright red paint. Dust had settled in it, in places, especially on the wheels; but above, on the doors, it was clear and unmistakable.

"Vernet," he shouted, excitedly, "it is the one! Quick! Don't let them get away."

Vernet stepped up to the quivering motor. At the wheel sat a young man, quite composed. In the tonneau, a veiled woman reclined at ease. In her hands she held a brown paper package.

She leaned toward Vernet, and spoke a single word to him. Duvall did not hear what it was; but its effect upon the Prefect's man was instantaneous—electrical. He stepped back and raised his hat. "Pardon, Madame," he said, and the Pasquet rolled through the gate and into the streets of Paris unmolested.

Duvall had sprung forward, and, as he did so, swept the occupants of the car with his electric searchlight. Suddenly he drew back in amazement, just as Vernet allowed the car to pass on. He could scarcely believe that what he saw was a reality. There was the big black car, its body and wheels plentifully bespattered with the identifying red stain—and there, at the wheel, sat Alphonse Valentin, while the veiled woman in the rear was—Grace!

He did not know it was Grace—he did know that it was the woman who had been with Valentin in his room, who had brought the message from the kidnappers to Mr. Stapleton, who, in some far off and intangible way, reminded him of Grace.

There she sat, in her hand the package containing Mr. Stapleton's money—and Vernet doffed his cap to her, and permitted her to go on! Was this woman, then, hoodwinking even the police?

He sprang to Vernet's side. "Stop them!" he cried, in a hoarse voice. "They are the ones I am after."

Vernet shook his head. "Impossible, Monsieur. They are given safe conduct by Monsieur the Prefect himself."

"But—they are thieves—kidnappers!"

Vernet shrugged his shoulders. "It may be so, Monsieur Duvall; but my orders are to let them pass."

The detective ground his teeth, helpless. His scheme for identifying the criminals had worked perfectly. He had found them, only to see both them and Mr. Stapleton's hundred thousand dollars as well slip quietly through his fingers. He cursed the whole police force of Paris roundly, in his anger.

The arrival of another car distracted his attention. It was Mr. Stapleton, hurrying home, in the hope of finding his boy. Duvall did not stop him. The banker was evidently thinking of nothing but his lost son.

Several other cars passed. Duvall had no interest in them. He was about to turn away, with the intention of hunting up Mr. Stapleton and learning whether or not the boy had been returned to him, when he heard a familiar voice calling him by name. He turned. It was Monsieur Lefevre, in a big dark green car.

“Mon Dieu! Duvall!” the Prefect cried, in pretended surprise. “You here! In Paris! Or do my eyes deceive me?”

The detective looked a bit sheepish. He realized that in not calling on his old friend before now, he had been guilty of an apparent rudeness which Monsieur Lefevre might justly resent. “Monsieur,” he cried, “it is indeed I.” He put out his hand, and grasped that of his old chief warmly. “A little matter of business brought me to Paris. I have only just arrived.”

“Indeed.” The Prefect’s eyes twinkled. “I hope, my dear fellow, that your other engagements will permit you to come and see me before long.”

“I shall come this very evening, Monsieur. In fact, I have a matter of the utmost importance . to discuss with you. Shall you be at liberty?”

“In an hour, mon ami. Until then I have other things to occupy me. Come to the Prefecture in an hour. I shall be waiting for you. For the present, adieu.” He called an order to his chauffeur, and drove rapidly off into the darkness.

Duvall turned on his heel and began to look for a taxicab. “Good night, Vernet,” he called out, as he went up the street.

In half an hour, he had reached Mr. Stapleton’s house. He found the unfortunate banker striding up and down his library in a towering rage. “The fellows have deceived me!” he cried. “They have not brought back my boy. Did you see anything of them? Tell me!” He grasped Duvall nervously by the arm.

“The car into which you threw the package of money contained, besides the chauffeur, but one occupant, a woman, did it not?”

“Yes—yes! Did you get her?”

“No.”

“Why not? Did your scheme to identify the car fail to work?”

“On the contrary, it worked perfectly. I stopped the car at the barrier. The woman in it had the package of money in her hand.”

“And you did not arrest her! In Heaven’s name, why not?”

“The police would not permit me to do so. The woman was the same one who brought you the message last night, the supposed agent of the police. They allowed her to pass the gates.”

“What?” the banker fairly shouted his question. “This is ridiculous! is the woman a criminal, or is she a detective? She cannot be both, and if she is the latter why was she in that car, with my money in her hand?”

“I do not know. But I mean to find out very shortly.”

“How? I’d like to know!”

“I am going to see the Prefect of Police at once.”

Mr. Stapleton sank into a chair, and groaned. “I had hoped to have Jack with me by now. His poor mother is distracted. Isn’t there anything, Mr. Duvall, that you can do?”

“I hope to answer that question better, Mr. Stapleton, after I have seen Monsieur Lefevre. If this woman, and her companion, Valentin, are really the kidnappers, they are in Paris, and we shall be able to lay our hands on them without difficulty. If they are not, your money, at least is safe. I must leave you now; but as soon as I learn anything, I will report to you at once. Good night.”

He left the house, more mystified than he had ever been in his life. From the start, this case had apparently been one in which all the clues led to absurd contradictions, or else to nothing at all.

In fifteen minutes he was at the Prefecture.

Monsieur Lefevre sent out word that he would be occupied for a few moments, and the detective sat down as patiently as possible, to wait.

CHAPTER X

THE events of the Versailles road left Grace Duvall in a high state of good humor. The plan she had suggested had been a success—at least so far as her own part in it was concerned. How Monsieur Lefevre had fared, she did not yet know. She looked down at the brown paper package she held in her hand, and ordered Valentin to drive to the Prefecture.

The day had been an eventful one. Immediately after breakfast Grace had gone to Mr. Stapleton's house and had a long interview with Mrs. Stapleton. That lady, apparently quite prostrated from worry and alarm over the fate of her son, received her in her boudoir, where she lay, a charming picture, upon a divan.

Grace had no more than entered the room, when she detected the odor of cigarette smoke, faint but unmistakable. She glanced at the table which stood beside the divan upon which Mrs.

Stapleton lay. On it, a tiny porcelain ash receiver contained a fluffy mass of gray-white ashes, and the half smoked remains of a cigarette. The tip, partly covered by the ashes, was of gold.

The girl engaged her hostess in a long conversation, quieting her fears, which seemed real enough, and predicting the early recovery of her boy. It was quite evident that Mrs. Stapleton was terribly nervous. No doubt this accounted for the cigarettes. Although Grace did not use them herself, she knew how their quieting effect on the nerves made them almost necessities, at times, to their devotees.

Presently she observed that Mrs. Stapleton held within her left hand, concealed beneath the folds of her kimono, a small pasteboard box, a box of cigarettes. Grace determined upon a bold move.

"May I have one of your cigarettes, Mrs. Stapleton?" she asked, in her sweetest manner. "I've forgotten to bring any with me—and—you know how it is."

Mrs. Stapleton's features relaxed into something approaching a smile. She had been lying there wondering whether she dared offer one to Grace, and thus be able to sooth her own overstrained nerves. She brought forth the box and extended it toward her visitor. Grace took one of the tiny cylinders and lit it. //

was of the same make as the one she had secured in Alphonse Valentin's room!

She took her departure a little later, wondering greatly. The whole affair had begun to take on an air of baffling contradiction.

She spent the rest of the morning, and most of the afternoon, searching the houses near the point on the road to Versailles Indicated by Valentin. With her were three men from the Prefect's office—silent, able men. In plain clothes, who pretended to be keepers from the Jardin des Plantes, in search of a dangerous cobra, which was supposed to have escaped from Its cage the night before.

The terrified householders threw open their doors with unassumed alacrity. The suggestion of a deadly reptile lurking in their gardens was a veritable open sesame. Yet no traces of the missing boy were found, and, more remarkable still, Grace was unable to Identify any of the many gardens as the one in which she had seen the child playing with the spaniel. This disappointed her greatly. She knew well that, If Valentin was telling the truth, the garden was here; yet, although they visited every house within a quarter of a mile, they were unable to locate it. She remembered now that in her agitation, her eager examination of the child, she had not fixed upon her mind any salient point in the garden itself. All that she remembered was a bit of grass, a gravel walk, and the child playing with the dog. A dozen of the little inclosures presented similar features. She returned to the Prefecture, baffled.

"The fellow is undoubtedly lying," had been Monsieur Lefevre's comment. "He is trying to throw you off the track, in order to protect the nurse, and possibly Mrs. Stapleton as well. I should not be surprised to find that the boy's mother is the guilty person."

Grace did not agree with him; so she said nothing. In spite of the fact that Mrs. Stapleton used cigarettes similar to those which seemed in some queer way to be at the bottom of the mystery, she had an intuitive feeling that the grief which the banker's wife showed was entirely real.

At half past seven, Grace left the Prefecture in a high-powered car, furnished by Monsieur Lefevre. Alphonse Valentin was at the wheel.

In her hand she held a pocket electric searchlight, across the front of which had been affixed a circular bit of blue glass.

At ten minutes to eight she arrived at Versailles. She at once ordered Valentin to turn and drive back toward Paris at moderate speed. She did not take him into her confidence regarding what she proposed to do, but kept a keen watch for the car containing Mr. Stapleton.

Her plan had worked. Mr. Stapleton, seeing her signal, had tossed her the package of money —she only hoped that the other part of her plan had been carried out with equal success.

The other part of the plan had been this: Monsieur Lefevre, who in build and general appearance was not unlike Mr. Stapleton, was to follow the latter's car in a machine of the same make and general appearance. He was to be driven by a chauffeur made up to resemble Fran�ois sufficiently to be mistaken for him in the dim light of early evening. He himself was to make such alterations in his appearance and dress as would enable him to pass, under a cursory examination, for Stapleton. In the bottom of the car two armed men lay concealed.

When the car containing Mr. Stapleton turned back toward Paris, after having unwittingly delivered the money to Grace, the Prefect would continue on toward Versailles. He would know that the car containing the kidnappers was still ahead of him; since, had it not been, it, instead of Grace's car, would have signaled Mr. Stapleton.

Grace had started out from Versailles especially early, convinced that the kidnappers would not leave there until eight, at least. In this assumption she was correct. The car containing the kidnappers was, at that moment, creeping toward Paris some two miles in her rear, looking everywhere for Mr. Stapleton.

The Prefect pursued his way toward Versailles in anxious expectancy. Each moment he thought to sec the blue signal flash from the various cars which passed him. When it came, his men were to spring up, and at once bring the other car to a standstill by firing their guns, heavily charged with buckshot, at its wheels. A punctured tire, and the thing was done. His men, assisted by the chauffeur, would then overpower the occupants of the other car before they could realize what had happened. In it they hoped to find the child.

The plan was well conceived; but unfortunately it did not work. Whatever the reason, none of the cars which passed the Prefect on his way to Versailles displayed the telltale blue light. All seemed but peaceable automobilists, intent

on reaching Paris and its restaurants as quickly as possible. Had his disguise been penetrated? He could not believe it. He returned to the Prefecture in great disgust, wondering in what way matters had gone wrong.

Grace was waiting for him, an eager smile on her face. “Here is the money,” she said, placing the package on his desk. “Did you get the men?”

“No.” The Prefect flung himself into a chair. “They did not signal.”

“But why, I wonder?” The failure of her plan was extremely annoying.

“I can think of but one reason. There must have been some way in which these fellows knew the Stapleton car when they approached it—some signal, perhaps, that I was unable to give.”

“But no such signal was mentioned in the instructions I brought to Mr. Stapleton. He gave none, as we approached him.

“Did you observe anything peculiar about the appearance of his car, anything that might have served as a clue to enable these fellows to recognize it, even in the dark, with certainty?”

Grace thought a moment, then her face fell. “There was one thing that I noticed as Mr. Stapleton’s car came up to us; but I am afraid I failed to realize its significance at the time.”

“What was it?”

“The electric headlight on the side nearest to me was working very badly. In fact, it seemed to be almost out. The other was burning brilliantly.”

The Prefect sprang to his feet. “Sacre!” he exclaimed. “Of course. The thing is as plain as the nose on your face!”

“But who—”

“Fran�ois! The fellow is in this thing up to his neck. He claims to have been asleep when the boy was stolen. He drives the car which brings you back, after your abduction. He, disguised, steals the box of cigarettes. He fixes the lights so that the kidnappers are advised, not only beyond any doubt that they are

signaling the right car, but that all is safe—that Monsieur Stapleton has no detectives or members of the police hidden in his tonneau. The thing is perfectly clear. Believe me, my child, had there been anyone in that car with Mr. Stapleton, those lights would have both been burning with equal brightness, as mine were. They did not give me the signal, when they passed me, because the lights failed to tell them that all was well."

Grace looked up quickly. "Then, if that is true, Fran�ois knew that Mr. Stapleton had thrown the money into the wrong car."

"Undoubtedly, and by this time, no doubt, his confederates know it as well. Naturally the child has not been delivered. We are just where we were before."

"You will arrest Fran�ois at once, I suppose."

"No. It will be useless. By leaving him free, we may learn something. By locking him up, with no tangible evidence against him, we accomplish nothing at all."

"Then what do you advise?"

"You will return the money to Mr. Stapleton at once. You can tell hin), if you wish, how it came into your possession. He will be furious, of course; but he must understand that the capture of these scoundrels is quite as important to the city of Paris as the recovery of his son. We have done our best, and failed. We must try again."

"Richard was at the Porte de Versailles," remarked Grace, quietly. "He tried to stop my car.

"Yes. I saw him. He is coming here at once."

The girl rose, in nervous haste. "I must go, then. It would be most unwise to have him find me here."

There was a quick knock at the door. The Prefect rose, and opened it; then turned to Grace with a grim smile. "Your husband is waiting in the anteroom," he whispered.

"But—what shall I do?"

“Wait in here.” Monsieur Lefevre opened the door which led to his private office. “You can hear everything quite plainly. From what you tell me, I should not be surprised if he insisted upon your arrest at once.”

“It isn’t fair to him. Poor Richard! I’m afraid he’ll never forgive me for all this.”

“Nonsense! You are engaged in a very laudable attempt to recover Mrs. Stapleton’s child. So is he. Your interests are identical. Only,” he paused with a significant smile, “from my standpoint, I should much prefer that the credit for the boy’s recovery should belong to the police of Paris, of which you, for the time being, arc one.”

Richard Duvall came into the Prefect’s office, somewhat ill at ease. The room, familiar to him because of the events of the past, reminded him forcibly of Grace—who had, indeed been upon his mind constantly for the past few days. It was here, in this very room, that she had first told him that she loved him—during the exciting pursuit of Victor Girard, and the million francs. He gazed about at its familiar aspect, and sighed.

“Sit down, my dear Duvall,” said the Prefect, shaking hands with him warmly. “What, may I ask, brings you to Paris, at the cost of interrupting your honeymoon? I had supposed that nothing could be of sufficient importance for that. In fact, had I known you would consider it for a moment, I should have cabled to you, to give me your assistance in a most trying case.”

“What case, Monsieur?”

“The mysterious kidnapping of the child of Monsieur Stapleton.”

“It is that very case that brings me to Paris. I am in Mr. Stapleton’s employ.”

Monsieur Lefevre affected to be greatly surprised. “Is It possible, mon ami? That is bad news indeed. This fellow Stapleton no longer has confidence in my office. He retains you to do that which he believes I shall fail to do. I am sorry, my dear Duvall, that we are on opposite sides of the fence.”

“But, Monsieur, I did not know that you wanted me. Mr. Stapleton is an old friend. I could not refuse to come to his assistance.”

Lefevre’s eyes twinkled. “Have you made any progress, then, my friend?”

“Yes. Tonight I put in operation a plan whereby I might identify an automobile containing the kidnappers, into which Mr. Stapleton had been directed to throw a package containing one hundred thousand dollars.”

“Indeed. You interest me. And did you succeed in identifying it?”

“I did. I stopped the car, at the Porte de Versailles. I knew it to be the one into which the money had been thrown. The car was driven by a man named Alphonse Valentin, whom I have every reason to suspect is concerned in this affair. Its only other occupant was a woman—whom I met last night in Valentin’s rooms, and who brought Mr. Stapleton a message from the kidnappers. This woman is, I believe, at the bottom of the whole thing.”

“Indeed. And did you arrest her?”

“No. She claims to be an agent of your office. Vernet, who was at the gates at my request, refused to place her and her companion under arrest. She got away with Mr. Stapleton’s money. I believe, Monsieur Lefevre, that you are being made a fool of by a member of your own staff.”

The Prefect leaned over, and picked up the package containing the money which lay upon his desk. “I do not agree with you, my friend. Here is Monsieur Stapleton’s money.”

Duvall started back in his chair, amazed. “Good Lord, Chief, am I losing my senses? What is this affair, anyway, a joke?”

“Far from it, Monsieur Duvall. The criminals are still at large. The boy is in their hands. We must recover him.”

“But—this money—”

“I arranged to get it, in order to prevent Monsieur Stapleton from making a fool of himself. I wish to capture these men—not to let them blackmail him out of half a million francs.”

“Had you not interfered, Monsieur Lefevre, they would have been in my hands, by now. I would have had them safely the moment they attempted to enter Paris. I knew their car.”

The Prefect was filled with curiosity. “How?” he asked.

“My means of a device with which Mr. Stapleton’s car was equipped, the body of the one into which he threw the money was spattered with red paint. I could have identified it anywhere.”

“My dear Duvall! I feel that I should beg your pardon. Your plan was cleverness itself, and I will admit that, had I not interfered, you would in all probability have captured these men. I did not know what you had done, of course. Yet in their escape I have one consolation. It would have been extremely distasteful to me, to have had Mr. Stapleton boast that a private detective in his employ had succeeded, where the police of Paris had failed.”

“Then it would appear, Monsieur,” said Duvall somewhat stiffly, “that we are, in this matter at least, in opposition.”

“Let us rather say, my friend, in competition.” He placed his hand on Duvall’s shoulder. “You must not blame me, if I feel a pride in my office. When you were working for the city of Paris, you, too, felt that pride. I am truly sorry that I have not the benefit of your services now. However, I think you will admit, mon ami, that the young woman who is handing this case is no mean adversary.” The Prefect regarded the detective with a quizzical smile, behind which his eyes twinkled merrily.

“Who is this woman?” asked Duvall, quickly.

“Her name is—Goncourt—Estelle Goncourt.”

“A Frenchwoman?”

“Partly. I believe her mother was English.” The twinkle in his eye spread—he smiled upon the detective with expansive good humor. “Why do you ask?”

“You will think it strange, perhaps, Monsieur Lefevre, but when I first saw Miss Goncourt, she reminded me strongly of my wife.”

“Of Grace?”

“Yes. Have you not observed it?”

“Now that you speak of it, perhaps there is something similar in the manner—the carriage. But your wife, my dear Duvall, is a blonde, while Mademoiselle Goncourt is decidedly a brunette.”

“Yes. Of course. But, nevertheless, the resemblance is striking.” He rose to go. “I hope, Monsieur, that this kidnapped boy may be restored to his father very soon. I am anxious to return to America.”

“What! Leave Paris so quickly? My dear Duvall, I thought you Americans loved our city so well, that you never wanted to leave it.”

“Paris is all right, Monsieur; but,” he laughed heartily, “I must get back to my wife and my farm. I was forced to leave in the very middle of my spring plowing.”

The Prefect roared. “You—a farmer! Mon Dieu! How droll! Potatoes, I suppose, and chickens, and dogs, and pigs—”

“Exactly—and, believe me, Monsieur, they are more to my liking, than all the gaieties of Paris—Some day you must make us a visit, and see for yourself.” He turned toward the door.

“I shall, Duvall, I shall. But first we have to find this boy. What do you propose to do next?”

Duvall smiled. “What do you?” he retorted.

“A bottle of champagne, my friend, and a dinner at the Cafe Royale, that we find the child before you do!”

“Done! Now I’ll be off. Goodnight.”

The Prefect was still laughing when Grace peeped in from the private office, to find that Richard had gone. “I think it’s a shame to treat him so,” she said. “The poor fellow! And he would have gotten the kidnappers, if we hadn’t interfered.”

Monsieur Lefevre picked up the package containing Mr. Stapleton’s money and placed it carefully in his safe. “Tomorrow you must return it to him,” he said. “And then, I would suggest that you keep a close watch upon Mrs. Stapleton. My men have not been keeping her under surveillance. We have had no

suspicions of her whatever. She may, if she is concerned in this matter, be imprudent enough to attempt to visit the child."

"And if not?"

"Then watch Fran�ois. If nothing comes of your efforts in either direction, I fear that we must wait for the kidnappers to make the next move. Of course there is Valentin—"

"Valentin is innocent."

"How do you know that?"

"I have watched him. He did everything in his power, tonight, to assist me. Had he been in league with the kidnappers, he could, after he knew that I had secured the money, easily have driven the car to some quiet spot and taken it from me. I was waiting for some such move; but he, as you know, did not attempt it. I am sure that he is doing his best to assist us,"

"In that event, perhaps you can induce him to tell you the secret of the box of cigarettes. I feel sure that this knowledge would go far toward solving the entire affair."

"I'll have a talk with him tomorrow."

"Good! And now, if you are ready, we will return home at once."

"Dear old Richard!" said Grace, as the Prefect helped her into his automobile. "I wish I were with him tonight."

Lefevre smiled, and patted her hand. "So do I, my dear. But, remember, you have only to find Mr. Stapleton's child, and you can return to your chickens and your cows with the knowledge that you have done both his parents and myself an inestimable service."

CHAPTER XI

IX was close to eight o’clock next evening when Grace Duvall arrived at Mr. Stapleton’s house with the package containing the money.

She was accompanied, for safety, by two men from the Prefecture, who escorted her to the door.

She had paid a previous visit to the house, during the forenoon; but Mr. Stapleton was not at home, and she was informed that he would not return until evening.

Mrs. Stapleton she saw again; but her talk with the latter resulted in nothing. The poor lady was in utter despair, after the fiasco of the night before, and spent the day in her rooms, weeping.

It was quite clear to Grace that her grief was very real. She made up her mind that, whatever the mystery of the gold-tipped cigarettes, Mrs. Stapleton had nothing to do with it. Nor had the chauffeur, Valentin, been more communicative. He refused pointblank to explain the presence of the cigarettes in his room, or the reason why Mary Lanahan had written requesting him to destroy them. He said that it was a matter which concerned only the nurse and himself, and assured Grace that an answer to her questions would not assist in the least in recovering the missing child.

Mr. Stapleton was awaiting her in the library when she entered. The Prefect had telephoned him, advising him that the money was safe, and would be returned to him at once. Beyond that, he knew nothing, except what Duvall had told him the night before. Consequently he was in a decidedly bad humor.

Grace laid the money on the table. “Here is your hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Stapleton,” she said.

The irate banker glared at her. “I cannot thank you for bringing it back. Miss,” he growled. “Did I not particularly request that the police take no steps in the matter?”

“You did, Mr. Stapleton; but we acted for what we thought to be your best

interests.”

“Hang your thoughts about my best interests I

I can take care of them. If you had let things alone, Vd have my boy back by now.”

“And these men, these criminals, who stole him, would be at liberty to do the same thing over again tomorrow.”

Mr. Stapleton was silent for a moment. “How did the thing happen?” he presently asked.

Grace told him. “The real cause of our failure, wc believe, lies at the door of your chauffeur, Fran�ois.” She explained the reasons for their suspicions.

Mr. Stapleton seemed puzzled. “The fellow seems honest enough.”

“Where is he now?” Grace inquired.

“He asked permission to visit his people. As I had no use for him this evening, I told him he might go.”

“Ah! In that event, we may learn something. He is being closely watched.”

As Grace spoke, a servant entered the room. “There is a gentleman to see you, sir,” he said to Mr. Stapleton.

“Who is it?”

“He would not give his name. He said his business was urgent.”

“Where is he now?”

“In the reception room, sir.”

Mr. Stapleton rose. “Excuse me a moment,” he said, and went into the adjoining room.

The library was separated from the reception room by a short passageway, or alcove, in which hung a pair of heavy curtains. Grace sat quietly, waiting for Mr.

Stapleton to return. Suddenly she realized that she could distinctly hear what was going on in the room adjoining. For a moment she thought of going into the hall; then a word or two caught her attention, and in a moment she was close to the curtains, listening intently to a most remarkable conversation.

The man who had asked to see Mr. Stapleton stood in the reception room, near a broad window overlooking the street without. He was tall and somewhat heavily built; but what at once attracted Grace's attention was his heavy black beard. She recognized him at once as the man who had broken into Valentin's room to steal the cigarettes, and had later driven the car which brought her back to Paris after her abduction.

He was speaking to Mr. Stapleton in a quiet and assured tone, as though discussing a topic of no greater importance than the weather.

"Mr. Stapleton," he said, "I have your son in my possession. He is quite safe. I gave you an opportunity to have him returned to you last night; but you did not avail yourself of it."

"I did my best," exclaimed the astounded banker, mastering his desire to take the fellow by the throat.

"That may be; yet my plans were interfered with. You did not carry out my instructions."

"I did—to the letter."

The man frowned. "It is useless to discuss the matter now," he growled. "I come to give you one more chance. It will be the last—"

"You damned scoundrel!"

The man with the black beard held up his hand. "It will avail nothing, Monsieur," he said, calmly, "to excite yourself. If you want back your boy, listen to what I have to say."

"Very well. Go ahead."

"First, I want no interference by the police, or by the man Duvall, who is acting for you."

Mr. Stapleton drew back in astonishment. “How do you know that Mr. Duvall is acting for me?” he said.

“It is my business to know, Monsieur. Let it suffice that I do know. If you hope ever to see your child again, you had better listen to what I have to say, and carry out my instructions to the letter.” His voice was harsh, menacing.

Mr. Stapleton directed him by a gesture, to proceed. He was too angry to speak.

“Tomorrow night at this hour—eight o’clock —I shall come here, to this house, and ask for you. You will hand me a package containing one hundred thousand dollars. I will examine the money here, and satisfy myself that the amount is correct.

“I shall then leave the house, and walk to the Arc de Triomphe; which, as you know, is but a short distance away. At the Arc de Triomphe, I shall wait for an automobile, which will stop for me. In that automobile I shall drive away. If I get away safely without interference, there will be telephoned to your house, within half an hour, the address of the place where your boy is to be found. If I do not get away safely, that address will not be telephoned to you, and you will not see your child alive again. This is your last chance, Monsieur. It is most important, I assure you, that nothing should happen to prevent my safe departure tomorrow night.”

For a moment Grace was undecided as to how she should act. She feared greatly, under the circumstances, to make any move which would endanger the safety of Mr. Stapleton’s child. Yet her duty, as an agent of the police, was clear. She must use every effort to effect this man’s capture, before he left the house.

She knew that she could not reach the street without passing the door of the reception room, in which case both Mr. Stapleton and his caller would see her. There was nothing to do but telephone. She flew to a small alcove room which opened off the rear of the library, in which she knew the telephone instrument was located. Once in this small room, she closed the door, for fear the others might overhear her, then called up the Prefecture. Monsieur Lefevre was out; but she acquainted one of his assistants with the circumstances, and requested him to send a man to the house at once.

It would take at least ten minutes, perhaps more, for the man from the Prefecture to reach the house even though he came by automobile, as he no doubt would.

What should she do, to keep the man in the reception room from leaving before the police should arrive?

The question was solved for her, quite unexpectedly. In opening the door of the small room, to re-enter the library, she accidentally struck against a chair. The sound aroused both Mr. Stapleton and his visitor. The former, who had, in his excitement, completely forgotten Grace's presence, appeared at once in the doorway between the two rooms. "Come here, Miss Goncourt," he said sternly.

Grace entered the reception room. The man with the black beard eyed her keenly. "Ah—a representative of the police, I believe. Our conversation has been overheard, then, Monsieur Stapleton?"

The banker was violently angry. He turned to Grace. "You have heard?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Then I insist that you do not interfere in the matter in any way. I intend to get my boy back this time, in spite of you all."

Grace made no reply. She saw the man with the black beard eying her keenly. "I think, Monsieur, that I had better go," he remarked.

Grace regarded him with a level look. "You cannot leave this house," she said. "It is being watched. If you attempt to do so, I will give the alarm."

"And for what reason should I stay?" the man inquired calmly.

"I have telephoned to the Prefecture. A man will be here in a few minutes, to place you under arrest. I advise you to remain here quietly until he arrives."

The kidnapper strolled over to the window which overlooked the Avenue Kleber, drew aside the curtain, and looked out. Grace wondered if he was making a signal of any sort to confederates outside. He gazed into the street intently for a moment, then turned back toward the center of the room. "I shall follow your advice. Mademoiselle, and wait," he remarked, calmly.

Mr. Stapleton was speechless -with rage. He dared not do anything; for he knew that he would only lay himself open to a charge of resisting the police, and

helping a criminal to escape. He sat in his chair, inwardly cursing Grace and the entire police force of Paris as well.

None of the three spoke for a considerable time. After what seemed to Grace ages, she heard the faint ringing of the doorbell, and presently the frightened servant arrived, with the information that a detective from the Prefecture was in the hall, and desired to see Mr. Stapleton immediately. He had scarcely succeeded in delivering this message, when a heavily built man in citizen's clothes shouldered past him into the room.

He gazed quickly about. Grace did not remember having ever seen him before. "I am from the Prefect of Police," he announced, striding toward the kidnapper. "I am here to arrest this man." In a moment the dick of the handcuffs, as he snapped them upon the wrists of the man with the black beard, came to Grace's ears.

The kidnapper smiled pleasantly. "I am quite ready to accompany you, my friend," he said.

Mr. Stapleton was regarding the scene in helpless rage. He resented bitterly the way in which the police continually interfered with his plans to get back his child. In one way, he was glad to feel that the guilty man was under arrest; but, if it resulted in the death of the missing boy, it would be a tragedy, indeed. He turned to the man with the black beard who stood, smiling, near the door. "I hope you will understand," he said, "that I have nothing to do with this matter — nothing whatever. The presence of this woman here was a pure accident. I had forgotten that she was in the next room. I'd be glad enough to see you put behind the bars for the rest of your life; but not if it is going to prevent me from getting back my child."

The man with the black beard continued to smile pleasantly. "I believe you, my friend," he said. "However, there is no harm done. When I return tomorrow night —for I shall return, depend upon it, in spite of the efforts of this gentleman," he waved his hand lightly toward the man from the Prefecture, "I trust that you will have persuaded Monsieur Lefevre, and your man Duvall as well, to let me do so in peace. It is the only way in which anything can be accomplished—I assure you of that." He turned to his captor. "I am ready to accompany you, Monsieur."

The officer started toward the door leading into the hall. He had taken but a

single step when the servant, with a frightened look upon his face, appeared in the doorway. “Mr. Stapleton,” he stammered, “there is a man here from the office of the Prefect of Police.”

Stapleton strode toward the door. “Another?” he exclaimed. “What does this mean?”

The man in charge of the kidnapper stepped forward, speaking in a quick, low tone. “Leave the matter to me, Monsieur,” he whispered. “This fellow who has just arrived is an impostor, a confederate. He pretends to be an agent of the police, in order to rescue his comrade, who has undoubtedly signaled to him from the window. Be good enough to step into that room,” he pointed to the library, “and let me deal with him.”

Mr. Stapleton hesitated. “What do you propose to do?” he asked.

“Quick!” said the other, offering no explanations. “He will be here at once.” He turned to the astonished servant. “Bring the man in.”

The puzzled banker moved toward the adjoining room. “You will accompany him, please,” the Prefect’s man said to Grace. “There may be danger.”

“I am not afraid, Monsieur,” replied Grace, who did not entirely like the way things were going.

The man, however, paid no attention to her remonstrances. “Go—at once, I command you, in the name of the law!”

She hesitated no longer, but followed Mr. Stapleton into the library. As she did so, the new arrival entered the reception room.

The man with the black beard stood to one side of the doorway. His captor advanced toward the newcomer. “I have him here,” he exclaimed, pointing to the kidnapper, “safely ironed.”

“Who are you?” curtly inquired the man who had just entered the room.

“A private detective. Here is your man. Let us get him out of here at once.”

The official made no reply, but stepped quickly up to the man with the black

beard. “Come along with me,” he said, roughly, and placed his hand upon the other’s arm.

As he did so, the kidnapper shook his wrists briskly. The handcuffs fell clattering to the floor. Without a word he threw his powerful arms about the neck of the astonished official, and throttled him into instant silence. His companion, no less quick, whipped out a handkerchief, and knotted it about the official’s mouth. He was unable to utter a sound.

The whole thing was so quickly done that Grace, who was watching the room through the curtains in the doorway, had barely time to utter a cry, before the newcomer was lying helpless and silent upon the floor, choked into insensibility; while the two men, quite evidently confederates, made ready to go.

The black-bearded fellow quickly replaced the handcuffs upon his own wrists. “Quick, Ramond,” he cried. “Let us get out at once.”

Grace was by this time in the room. She knew that she must in some way prevent these men from escaping. But how—how? They glared at her ominously. The younger man drew a revolver. Before any of them could speak, the servant appeared in the doorway for the third time. His face was pale as death. His knees knocked together from terror as he beheld the gleaming revolver, the man lying upon the floor.

“Monsieur Duvall is here!” he gasped, and stood silent.

The man on the floor, recovering his senses, began to struggle to his feet. As he did so, Duvall pushed his way past the frightened servant and strode into the room.

“Quick, Monsieur Duvall!” the fellow with the revolver cried. “I am from the Prefecture. I have one of the kidnappers in irons. The other,” he pointed to the struggling man on the floor, “is about to escape me. Give me your assistance at once!”

Grace was so astounded by the sudden entrance of her husband, as well as by the kidnapper’s words, that for a moment she remained speechless. Duvall bent over the man upon the floor and seized him by the throat.

“Richard! Richard!” Grace screamed, forgetful of Monsieur Lefevre and her own

disguise. “Look out!”

Almost before the words had left her lips, the man with the revolver brought it down with a dull thud upon Duvall’s head as he bent over the prostrate man; then, grasping his companion by the arm, he rushed from the room.

“Richard! Richard!” screamed Grace, throwing her arms about the senseless body of her husband.

Mr. Stapleton, who had entered the room, regarded her in amazement. “What are you doing?” he exclaimed.

Grace rose, her face white with suffering. “A doctor, quick! He is hurt! My God —don’t you see? He is hurt!” As she spoke, she fell back, fainting, to the floor.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Richard Duvall returned to consciousness, an hour later, he lay upon a couch in Mr. Stapleton's library. A doctor, hastily summoned, was bending over him. Mr. Stapleton sat grimly in an arm chair. There was no one else in the room.

"My wife I is she here?" the detective cried, as he tried to rise.

The doctor pushed him gently back. "Compose yourself, Monsieur," he said in a soothing voice. "You arc not badly hurt. Merely stunned for the moment. A slight cut—that is all. You will be quite yourself again in half an hour."

"But my wife!" He gazed eagerly about the room.

"What do you mean, Duvall?" inquired Mr. Stapleton, calmly. "Why do you think your wife is here?"

"A trace of delirium. He will be all right in a few moments. Very usual in such cases," the doctor whispered.

"I heard her voice. She called to me by name, just as that fellow struck me."

"My dear sir, your mind is wandering. Compose yourself, I beg." The doctor attempted to press his patient back upon the pillows.

Duvall passed his hand over his forehead, completely bewildered. "I could have sworn I heard her voice," he cried.

"It was Miss Goncourt, the young woman from the Prefecture, that you heard, Duvall," remarked Mr. Stapleton quietly. He did not tell the detective that Grace, on recovering from her faint, and learning from the doctor that Richard's wound was a superficial one only, and not at all serious, had sworn them both to secrecy, on the plea that the matter was a purely private one, and likely to cause her great unhappiness if divulged. Mr. Stapleton had agreed, but had done so only upon her agreeing not to acquaint the police with his plans for the following night.

She had suddenly conceived a violent animosity toward these fellows who had

not only baffled both her husband and herself, but had made the former a victim of a dangerous assault. She was determined to go to work in desperate earnest, to capture them, or locate the child, before the following evening. She had promised Mr. Stapleton not to acquaint Monsieur Lefevre with the plan for returning the child which the man with the black beard had proposed. The situation put her on her mettle. She determined to get at the bottom of the whole affair before another twenty-four hours had passed. Upon leaving the house she called a taxicab, and at once ordered the chauffeur to drive her to the point on the Verseilles road where, according to Valentin, she had been placed in the automobile after her interview with the kidnappers. Here, she believed, lay the starting point of the whole mysterious affair.

Duvall, his consciousness returning, insisted upon getting up from the couch, and going to work with equal determination. The way in which he had been checkmated, in the whole affair, roused him, as well, to desperation. His professional skill, upon which the banker had set such great store, seemed to have deserted him. He felt humiliated, ashamed. In three days, he had accomplished nothing whatever. It was galling in the extreme.

Mr. Stapleton's explanations of his hallucination regarding his wife he accepted as true. The resemblance which Miss Goncourt bore to Grace, together with his constant thoughts of her, were, he argued, no doubt responsible for it. The blow upon the head made his recollections of the moments immediately preceding and following the assault extremely hazy. He put the matter out of his mind, and set to work with renewed energy.

So far, it seemed, he had met with but a single clue of any importance,—the cigarette with the gold tip which he had found in the Bois de Boulogne. He determined to follow this clue until he arrived at some definite result.

As soon as the doctor had departed after dressing the wound in his head, Duvall took a stiff drink of brandy, and, sitting down with Mr. Stapleton at the latter's desk, began to reconstruct, as far as he could, all the details of the kidnapping. He spoke his thoughts aloud, taking Mr. Stapleton into his confidence, since in this way he could most readily get his ideas into concrete form.

"Mr. Stapleton, I am, I confess, greatly humiliated at the progress, or lack of progress, which I have made in this case so far. I have made up my mind, however, to get these fellows, if it takes me the rest of the summer."

“You will have to work more quickly than that, Mr. Duvall,” observed the banker coldly. “I have made arrangements to recover my child by tomorrow night.”

“You are going to buy these rascals off, then?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“I decline to say. I’ve had enough interference with my plans already. Neither you nor the police have accomplished anything. Miss Goncourt knows what I propose to do; but she has given me her word not to interfere. If you are to accomplish anything, it must be before eight o’clock tomorrow night.”

“Very well. I will make my plans accordingly.”

“What do you propose to do?”

“That I cannot say, at the moment. I think, however, that I shall first try to find out who it is that smokes these gold-tipped cigarettes.” He drew the fragment of cigarette which he had found from his pocket, and placing it on the desk before him regarded it critically.

Mr. Stapleton gave a grunt. “What arc they, Exquisites?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

The banker laughed. “Easy enough. My wife smokes them.”

The detective looked up quickly. “Indeed! Brings them from America with her, I suppose.”

“Yes.”

Duvall began mentally to check off, in his mind, the various persons who might have used the cigarette which lay before him. Valentin, he now believed, was out of the question. His presence in the automobile, with Grace, the night before, indicated that he had nothing to do with the kidnappers.

There remained Mrs. Stapleton. Duvall had talked with her—seen her grief. He

was too shrewd a judge of human nature to think for a moment that it was assumed.

Who else? Suddenly an idea flashed into his mind. He wondered that he had not thought of it before. The nurse! He recalled vividly the marks he had observed on the dresser in the woman's room in New York.

"Is Mary Lanahan in the house?" he inquired of Stapleton.

"Yes. Why?"

"Kindly have her come here."

Mr. Stapleton pressed a button on his desk in silence. In a few moments, the nurse had been brought to the room by one of the other servants. She was haggard with grief and fear.

Duvall requested her to be seated, and began to ask her a number of apparently unimportant questions regarding the kidnapping.

She answered them frankly enough, although it was clear that she was very ill at ease.

Presently Duvall got up, and, calling Mr. Stapleton to one side, asked him, in a low tone, to detain the nurse in the library for a few moments. He wished to search her room.

"But It has already been thoroughly searched by the police."

"I know. But I must search it again. It will require but a few moments."

Stapleton nodded. "I will wait for you here, Mr. Duvall," he said. "Mar}', you will wait, as well."

The nurse's room was on the third floor, in a rear building. Duvall found It, after some slight difficulty, with the assistance of one of the other servants.

He seemed, on entering the room, to. have but one object in view. He went at once to the mantel, and, taking from it the two small bottle-shaped vases which stood upon it, shook them both vigorously. A faint rattling sound came from the

second. He turned it upside down upon the palm of his hand, and there tumbled out a quantity of ashes, and the butts of several partly smoked cigarettes. With a quiet smile he replaced them in the vase, and returned to the library.

“Mary, you may go now,” he said.

When the woman had gone, he turned to Mr. Stapleton. “It was Mary Lanahan herself who smoked the cigarette which I found in the grass,” he said.

“Well, what of it?” The matter seemed to the banker to be utterly without significance.

“She had, no doubt, stolen them from Mrs. Stapleton.”

“Very likely. Not a very serious matter, however.”

“No. But the question now arises, Why did she turn the box over to Valentin, and subsequently ask him to destroy it?”

“I cannot imagine.”

“And why, later, were these cigarettes stolen from Valentin, as I understand they were?’”

“It’s too much for me. What do you make of it?”

“I have a theory, Mr. Stapleton; but I cannot say just what it is—yet. By the way, where is your man, Fran�ois, tonight?”

“He is visiting his people, somewhere in the suburbs.”

“Ah! Then I would like to search his room, as well.”

“Go ahead. You will find nothing, I fear. The police have gone over it with a fine-tooth comb.” He rose. “Come along, I’ll go with you.”

The room occupied by the chauffeur was at the very top of the house, with two windows opening through the slanting mansard roof. One of these, Duvall noted, commanded a view over the houses adjoining toward the north, beyond which could be seen the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. A second window, toward the

south, commanded an extensive view toward Passy.

Mr. Stapleton, puffing because of the unaccustomed stairs, sat down upon the bed. “I cannot imagine what you hope to find here, Duvall,” he grumbled.

The detective made no reply, but began a systematic inspection of the room. One of the first objects which attracted his attention was an ordinary electric searchlight, of the pocket variety, lying on the man’s dresser. He picked it up, and examined it carefully.

“I got it for Fran�ois,” observed Mr. Stapleton, “so that he could examine the car, at night, in case of any accident or repair.”

“Of course. Very useful, too. But why, I wonder, does he keep it here in his room, instead of in the garage?”

“Possibly to light himself up the stairs, at night,” said Stapleton.

“Then I should think he would have it with him,” remarked Duvall, dryly. “Wouldn’t be of much use to him tonight, for instance.” He was about to put the thing down, when his attention was attracted by two objects, hanging one on each side of the dresser, from its two uprights. They were apparently Christmas tree ornaments, made of thin glass, and they hung from the back of the dresser by means of two bits of ribbon.

They seemed at first glance to be merely souvenirs of some party, some entertainment, which the chauffeur had preserved as mementos of the occasion. They were shaped like little cups, with a paper fringe about the top, to which the gay ribbons were attached. Duvall had seen such ornaments often before, at Christmas time. They were intended to be hung from the tree by their ribbons, and were filled with small candies or bonbons. He had almost passed them by, when something in their colors caused him to pause. One was a deep blue, the other an equally deep red. He examined the wooden uprights of the dresser with great care. All along the top of the dresser at its back was a heavy coating of dust. The top of the uprights, over which the loops of ribbon which supported the little baskets had been passed, contained no dust whatever.

Evidently the baskets had been taken down, and that too quite recently. For what purpose? he wondered. Suddenly he had an inspiration. He took down the little blue basket, and quickly placed it over the end of the searchlight. It fitted

perfectly, the paper collar at its top holding the glass hemisphere snugly in place.

Mr. Stapleton was watching Duvall without particular interest. Suddenly the detective pointed the searchlight toward him and pressed the button which threw on the current. Mr. Stapleton started back, as his face was flooded with a beam of brilliant blue light.

Duvall replaced the little basket in the same position in which he had found it, and laid the searchlight upon the dresser. “Rather neat, isn’t it?” he exclaimed.

“What do you make of it?” asked the banker.

“Your man Fran�ois evidently is in the habit of making signals,” the detective replied, laughing. He was beginning to feel hopeful. The search of the two rooms was bearing fruit.

For the next half-hour, Duvall went over the contents of the chauffeur’s room with the utmost care. He removed and replaced, just as he found them, the contents of the dresser drawers. He opened a small wooden trunk which stood at one side of the room, and examined its contents minutely. He explored the closet, looked behind the pictures, sounded the walls. Nothing further of an unusual nature rewarded his efforts. Still he seemed unsatisfied.

“What more can you hope to find, Mr. Duvall?” inquired the banker, who had begun to find the proceedings tiresome.

The detective stood in the center of the room, and glanced about in some perplexity. “I had hoped to find one thing more,” he said; “but I am afraid it isn’t here.”

Suddenly he strode over to the mantel, upon which stood a small nickel-plated alarm clock of American make.

“This clock doesn’t seem to be going,” he remarked, then whipped out his magnifying glass and carefully studied the brass handle which projected from the back, by which it was wound up. “It hasn’t been wound for several days, either. The back is covered with dust.” He picked up the clock and tried to wind it; but the handle resisted his efforts.

In an instant he took out his knife, and a moment later was removing the screws

which held the metal back of the clock in place.

Mr. Stapleton watched him curiously. Duvall's methods savored, to him, of the accepted sleuth of fiction. He took little stock in the tiny clues upon which the whole modern science of criminology is built.

In a few moments the detective had removed the screws and lifted out the rear plate of the clock. As he did so, he gave a grunt of satisfaction. A small pasteboard box fell out upon the mantel.

"What is it?" asked Stapleton.

"The box of cigarettes," remarked Duvall, as he opened it. "There are three missing. I shall take a fourth." He selected one of the paper-covered tubes, placed it within his pocketbook, then thrust the box back into the clock, and rapidly replaced the metal plate.

"I don't think there is anything further to be done here, Mr. Stapleton," he remarked. "I think I'll be getting along to my room. Tomorrow I shall be quite busy."

He stopped for a moment, on his way out, to glance from the window which faced toward the north. Between the buildings and trees ran the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, its course illuminated by many street lamps, and the flashing lights of passing motor cars. Duvall gazed intently at the scene before him for a few moments, then turned to the door, and, accompanied by Mr. Stapleton, descended the stairs.

As he was about to leave the house, the banker, who evidently had something on his mind, stopped him.

"Mr. Duvall," he said, earnestly, "I would like very much to know what you intend to do."

"I'm going to catch these fellows, if I possibly can," the detective replied, earnestly.

"What steps do you propose to take?"

"I cannot exactly say—yet. Why do you ask?"

“I’ll tell you. The fellow who was here tonight, the one with the black beard, is coming to see me tomorrow night, at eight o’clock. I cannot tell you more than that. I did not intend to tell you that much—but I am obliged to do so.”

“Obliged! Why?”

“Because I want your promise that you will make no attempt to stop him. If I had said nothing, you might have watched the house, and, upon recognizing the fellow as the one who was here tonight, have placed him under arrest. I want you to do nothing to interfere with either his coming or his going. He will be safe, after he once leaves the Arc de Triomphe in his automobile.”

“But the police?”

“They know nothing of the matter. Miss Goncourt has given me her word to remain silent. She has even agreed to have the men on watch about the house withdrawn. Both you and the police may do your best to catch this man, after I have carried out my compact with him; but until then I want you to keep your hands off.”

Duvall was silent for a moment. “Very well, Mr. Stapleton, I shall do as you say. In fact, to assure you that I am carrying out your wishes, I will agree to remain here with you, at the house, throughout the evening.”

“Good! I shall expect you. Good night.”

“Good night.” Duvall left the house, and went at once to his hotel.

Here, a few moments later, he seated himself in an easy chair, and taking from his pocket the cigarette which he had secured in the chauffeur’s room, regarded it critically.

After some little time, he took a match from a box upon a nearby table, and, placing the gold tip of the cigarette between his lips, carefully lit it.

He drew the smoke into his lungs, inhaling it deeply. Once—twice—three times he repeated the operation, then threw himself back into his chair, and, closing his eyes, sat buried in thought. In his preoccupation, he allowed the end of the cigarette to fall unheeded to the floor.

After many minutes he opened his eyes and started up. “I’ve got it!” he cried, and, picking up the half-burned cigarette from the floor, threw it carelessly into the fireplace.

Then he sat down at his table, drew out a sheet of paper and a map of the city of Paris, and began to make a series of drawings and calculations that occupied him far into the night.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was nearly ten o’clock when the taxicab containing Grace Duvall stopped alongside the road, at a point some four miles beyond the city, in the direction of Versailles. She had been unable to give the driver the exact location at which she desired to be put down, but had directed him to drive on until she told him to stop.

The spot was quite familiar to her, owing to the hours she had spent in the vicinity with the searching party the day before.

The taxicab driver seemed rather surprised to see her alight at this somewhat lonely spot; but be shrugged his shoulders with true Parisian indifference, pocketed the tip she gave him, and drove rapidly off in the darkness.

Left to herself by the roadside, Grace began to fear that she had, after all, done a rather foolish thing. Now that she was here, she hardly knew how to begin.

All about her she saw the dark outlines of cottages among the trees, with here and there a straggling light which betokened some household late in getting to bed. The country people in this vicinity—growers of flowers and vegetables or dairymen for the most part—were asleep with their cows about the time that Paris began to dine.

Occasionally the silence about her was broken by the mournful howling of a dog; but otherwise all was stilL

The night was cloudless, and the lightening of the sky toward the east told her that before long a moon would rise above the trees.

Near the road she found a little rustic bench, and upon this she sat down to think.

The howling of the dog had suggested to her mind a possible clue to the house within which Mr. Stapleton’s boy had been, for a time at least, confined. She could remember nothing of the garden, and but little of the room in which she had been confined; but the dog, playing upon the grass with the child, had fixed itself in her memory. She recollected distinctly that he was a poodle, mostly black, with fine curling hair, like astrakhan fur, and a pointed nose.

There were many dogs of this sort, she well knew, and yet there was one peculiarity which had impressed itself upon her memory, which would inevitably serve to identify this particular dog, should she ever see him again. His long and bushy tail, black for the most part like the rest of his body, terminated in a plume of white hair.

It was a most unusual marking in a French poodle. She had never seen it before, and she was a great lover of dogs, and knew them thoroughly. It was this fact, no doubt, which had caused her to notice the animal, at a time when her mind was filled with matters of vastly greater importance.

She had sought carefully for such a dog, on the occasion of the previous search, but had not found him. The tale about the escaped cobra tad caused the country folk to lock up their pets without loss of time.

Now she hoped to find this dog, and through liim discover the location of the house in which she had been confined. After that—well, she would do the best she could.

It occurred to her that she was not at all likely to discover the whereabouts of the black poodle by sitting here on a bench; yet she dared not start out until the moon had risen sufficiently high to light up her way.

In about an hour, the rim of the golden disk showed itself above the treetops, and a little later the black shadows about her began to grow luminous, and resolve themselves into white-walled cottages, hedges, and outbuildings of various sorts.

A narrow lane ran off from the main road, bordered on each side by lindens and poplars.

Along this lane the houses of the little hamlet were set, some near the road, others quite a distance back. She rose, and began to walk slowly along the lane.

As she had expected, dogs of various sorts and sizes, to judge by their voices, began barking as soon as she came opposite the first house. A small fox terrier ran through the gateway of a garden, yelping sharply. The deep-toned baying of a hound sounded farther up the street. A small white poodle, and a black one of the same size, ran after her, as she went along, making friendly attempts to play. The one she sought, however, seemed nowhere in evidence.

The lane ascended a gently sloping hill, at the top of which stood a house, somewhat larger than the others, whose outbuildings and pastures proclaimed it to be a dairy farm. There was a hedge of roses along the roadside, and a little wooden gate.

Grace heard a sharp bark on the other side of the gate as she passed it, and, stopping, glanced over. In the shadow stood a black poodle; but whether his tail showed the markings for which she sought she was unable to tell on account of the darkness. She gave the gate a gentle push, and it slowly opened. The dog ran out into the road. As he crossed a patch of moonlight, she saw that her search was ended. This, she was convinced, was the dog—and the house!

Her next problem was how to get inside. Try as she would, she could think of no excuse which would adequately account for her presence in this little frequented locality at such a time of night. That the occupants of the house had long ago retired was evidenced by the blackness of the windows, the silence which brooded over the whole place.

She looked about her. Just across the lane from the little gate a building loomed formless against a shadowy clump of trees. She went over to it, and found that it was a small shed. The door stood open. Inside stood a tumbledown old wagon, dust covered, and quite evidently unused for a long time. The shelter of the shed seemed grateful—as though she had arrived somewhere, instead of being a wanderer in the night.

There seemed nothing to do, now, but wait for daylight She climbed into the creaking wagon and sat upon the seat. There was a back to it, which, like the seat, was covered with old and torn velveteen. She leaned back in the shadow and closed her eyes. Her walk, the night air, had made her tired. In the distance she heard, after a long time, the faint booming of a bell. She looked at her watch. It was midnight.

The next thing that Grace remembered was the loud barking of a dr . She sat up, feeling stiff and cold. Her neck and left shoulder ached painfully. A glance through the open door of the shed told her that it was still night; but there was a gray radiance in the air, a soft pale light, that betokened the coming of dawn.

She crept stiffly down from the wagon, and again consulted her watch. It marked the hour of four. Through a dusty window in the side of the shed she saw the

eastern sky, rose streaked and bright, heralding the sun.

As the light increased, she saw the dog that had disturbed her sleep running about on the grass in front of the house opposite. The house seemed much nearer, in the daylight, than it had appeared at night. She examined the dog closely. The white tip of his tail, waving gaily in the morning light, showed her that it was the one she had sought.

She crouched in the dim shadow of the halfopen door and watched the scene before her. There was a man, moving about among the small buildings to the right. She heard him performing some task—she could not at first make out what. Presently the lowing of cattle, the rattle of a bucket, as it was drawn up by a creaking windlass, told her that the man was tending his cows.

Quite half an hour later she saw him going toward the house, a pail, evidently well filled, in each hand.

Then ensued another long silence. The curling wisp of smoke from the chimney of the cottage indicated breakfast, and Grace suddenly realized that she felt cold, and hungry. For the first time in her life she realized how important one's breakfast is, in beginning the day.

Presently the man reappeared and went toward a small building which Grace took to be the bam. She could see him clearly now; for the sun had risen above the trees and lit up the whole scene brilliantly. He was a small, wizened man, with gray hair and a slight stoop. She was quite certain that she had never seen him before.

He went to the barn, and she saw that he was engaged in harnessing a horse, which he presently attached to a farm wagon. She noted the wagon particularly. It was a low two-wheeled affair, with a dingy canvas top. A large patch in the canvas showed yellow-white in the sunlight. The horse was white.

In a little while the man began to put in the cart a variety of objects which he brought from the barn. They appeared to be baskets of vegetables or fruit, and cans of milk. Presently he stopped, and went toward the house. In a few minutes he returned. This time a woman was with him. They carried between them a large wicker basket, which appeared to be quite heavy. There was a top on the basket. Grace wondered if it could be filled with laundry.

The couple placed the basket in the wagon, putting it in from the front, so that it occupied a position close beside the driver. In getting it up over the wheel the woman let her end of it slip, and the man cursed her with such sudden sharpness that Grace was startled and crouched back into the shed. She wondered what the basket could contain, that made the man so careful, and the thought came to her, might it not be Mr. Stapleton's boy?

The idea possessed her completely. As the man drove out into the lane, and rattled down the hill toward the main road, she suddenly realized that she must follow; yet how could she hope to do so, on foot? The woman had gone back into the house. Regardless of consequences, Grace ran out into the lane, and after the wagon at full speed.

When she reached the main road the vehicle had already turned into it and was some distance away, headed for Paris, at a speed which, slow for a horse, was still much faster than she could possibly walk.

She looked up and down the road helplessly. There were several other wagons approaching, all going in the same direction—cityward. She realized that they were country people, farmers, taking their vegetables and flowers to the markets.

The first one to reach her was driven by a buxom-looking young woman, wearing a plaid shawl. Grace hailed her. "Will you be so good, Madame, as to take me to Paris?"

The woman glanced at her shrewdly. "I have a heavy load, Mademoiselle," she replied. Her voice was cold, uninterested.

"I will pay you five francs—"

The words had barely left Grace's lips, before the woman had pulled up her horse. "Five francs. Mademoiselle? That is another matter. Get in."

Grace clambered up beside the woman and glanced down the road ahead. The canvas-covered wagon was still in sight—amounting a hill some three or four hundred yards ahead.

The woman looked at her curiously, noting her dress, her hands, her shoes. "You are not of the country, Mademoiselle," she remarked, pleasantly.

“No. I belong in Paris.” She turned to her companion. “I should like to return there as quickly as possible.”

“My Susette does not care to go above a walk,” the woman remarked, gazing at her horse, plodding along with mechanical steps, as though utterly unconcerned as to whether or not they ever reached Paris. The wagon ahead was now out of sight, over the brow of the hill.

“Would you like to make a louis?” Grace took a gold piece from her purse and held it in the sunlight. It glistened brightly.

The woman drew back, regarding her companion suspiciously. “A louis? Who would not? What do you mean, Mademoiselle?”

“There is a wagon ahead of us, a canvas-covered wagon, with a white horse. I am following it. If you will keep that wagon in sight until we get to Paris, I will give you this louis.”

She turned the gold piece about, making it sparkle in the sun. The woman glanced first at her face, then more carefully at the coin, then, reaching over, took it in her fingers, and raised it to her mouth. Grace wondered what she was about to do. In a moment she had sunk her teeth into it, then returned it to her companion. “It shall be as you say. Mademoiselle,” she exclaimed as she pulled in the reins. “Allons, Susette!”

The horse, evidently awakened from his morning dreams, started forward with a suddenness which almost precipitated Grace from her seat. The trees along the roadside began tD fly past them. In ten minutes they were close behind the canvas-covered wagon, now moving along at a brisk pace.

When they reached the fortifications, the two wagons were separated by not more than a dozen feet. Grace’s companion glanced at her sharply. “From here I go to Grennelle, Mademoiselle,” she exclaimed.

Grace looked at the wagon ahead. “Follow it, please,” she said. “I will give you another five francs.”

The woman obeyed in silence. The wagon in front of them headed off toward the northwest, going in the direction of Passy. Before a great while it crossed the Pont de Passy, turned into the Rue Nicolo, and came to a stop before a small

brick house, standing in a little garden.

Grace jumped down at the corner, after giving the woman the louis and the additional five francs. “Thank you,” she said, and started slowly up the street.

The wagon with the canvas cover stood quietly alongside the curb. The old man who drove it had approached the door of the house, and was ringing the bell.

Presently one of the windows on the top floor was thrown open, and a man’s head was thrust out. Grace could not see his face clearly. He looked down at the man at the door, who at the same time looked up. The window was instantly .closed, and a few moments later the door of the house opened and the man came out.

He stood talking with the driver in low tones for a few moments. Grace had walked on up the street, fearing to attract attention. Looking back, she saw that the two men were gazing after her. She dared not turn her head again, but at the next corner turned into a cross street. Then she stopped, and cautiously peered around the comer. The two men had gone to the wagon and were lifting out the large basket. A few moments later they disappeared with it into the house.

After a time, the old man returned with the basket in his hands. From the way he carried it Grace could see that it was empty. He tossed it carelessly into the wagon, mounted the seat, and drove off.

Grace looked at her watch. It was half past seven. She felt cold and hungry, and determined to get something to eat at once. A little pastry cook’s shop and restaurant on the opposite side of the street attracted her attention, and she crossed over, entered, and ordered rolls and coffee. She could see the windows of the house into which the two men had carried the basket, from where she sat.

She scarcely knew what to do next. It seemed almost certain that Mr. Stapleton’s child was in the house across the way, and yet—it was merely an intuition, a guess, which might turn out to be entirely wrong. Yet she feared to go away, not knowing at what moment the child, if he was indeed there, might be taken elsewhere, and the clue hopelessly lost.

She finished her rolls and coffee, taking as much time to consume them as she could. She had just made up her mind to go, when the door of the house across the street opened, and a man came out. He was dark, and heavily built, and

dressed in the costume affected by artists. He headed directly for the pastry shop, and Grace realized that he was about to enter it.

She turned her face away, fearing lest he might have noticed her, as she walked up the street.

He did not even glance in her direction, however, but went at once to a counter at the rear of the place.

The proprietor came up to him with a smile, rubbing his hands together cheerily. “Ah! Monsieur Durand. Up early this morning, I see. What can I do for you?”

She did not catch the other’s reply, nor did she dare to glance at his face. She shrank back into her corner, and, picking up a newspaper which lay in the window sill, began to read.

The new customer remained but a few moments. When he left, Grace saw that he carried a large paper bag with him, which appeared to contain rolls or bread.

He again entered the house, but this time remained inside but a few moments. A little later she left the shop, and watched him as he disappeared down the street.

For half an hour she walked about, wondering whether she should telephone Monsieur Lefevre now, or wait until she had made certain that the whole affair was, after all, not a wild goose chased Suddenly she was seized with a new determination. She went boldly up to the house, and rang the bell.

In a few moments a sleepy-looking maid opened the door, eying Grace with lazy indifference.

“I wish to see Monsieur Durand,” the latter said.

“He’s out.”

“Then I must wait. I am a model. He instructed me to come at eight o’clock, and to wait until he returned.”

The girl shrugged her shoulders, and pointed to the stairs. “Top floor front,” she grumbled, and turned away.

Grace lost no time in getting up the stairs. To her surprise, the door of the studio, upon which was a card bearing Monsieur Durand's name, was unlocked. She pushed her way boldly in, and looked about. The room was scantily furnished, and contained little besides a couple of modeling stands, several large plaster figures and casts, two chairs, and a couch, evidently used as a bed. At the rear of the room was a closet. She turned to it and threw it open. It contained only an assortment of clothes.

She felt completely baffled. There was no possible place, here, in which the child she was seeking could be hidden. Evidently she had been on the wrong track. And yet—what had the wicker basket contained?

Suddenly she stopped, quivering with excitement. From somewhere in the room—she could not tell where—there came a low sobbing sound, as of a child, crying to itself. It vibrated throughout the room, at one moment close to her ears, the next far off, intangible, like a whispered echo. She stood, listening, every nerve tense with excitement, and still that low sobbing went on, coming from nowhere, evanescent as a dream.

The thing seemed unreal, horrifying. She gazed about helpless. Then she heard the front door of the house suddenly slam, followed by the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICHARD DUVALL rose, the following day, with a less troubled mind than at any time since his arrival in Paris.

His calculations of the night before had brought him to a definite conclusion.

After breakfasting in the cafe of the hotel he returned to his room, and rang up Monsieur Lefevre.

"I want the assistance of one of your men, Monsieur," he said.

"Ah!" laughed the Prefect. "You are—what you Americans call—up a tree, is it not?"

"Not at all. You have said that there existed between us a competition, to recover Mr. Stapleton's child. I think I am going to win. But since I am not in a position

to make the necessary arrests, myself, I am going to share the glory with you, my dear friend, by allowing one of your men to do so for me."

"So you are confident?"

"Reasonably so. Can you spare Vernet for the day. He is a good man."

"One of my best. You shall have him. And if you succeed, I shall still regard myself the loser, and will buy the champagne, and the dinner at the Cafe Royale, as I agreed."

"And I shall be most happy to do the same should I fail. Oblige me by requesting Vernet to come to my rooms at the hotel at once. Good by."

Duvall hung up the receiver, and sat down with the drawings he had made before him. He awaited the coming of Vernet with impatience.

The latter appeared in some twenty minutes.

"What can I do for you, Monsieur Duvall?" he asked.

"Good morning, Vernet. Sit down, and have a cigar. I have a little matter I wish to talk over with you."

"Concerning the missing child of Monsieur Stapleton, I understand," remarked Vernet, as he lit a cigar and drew his chair up to the table. He glanced at the drawings before him. "What are these, may I ask?"

Duvall took up his pencil. "This, Vernet, is a map of a small part of Paris. Here, as you see, is the Avenue Kleber, terminating at the Champs Elysees just in front of the Arc de Triomphe."

"I see. It is quite plain."

"Here—this black square—is Mr. Stapleton's house. From there to the arch is a matter of some six hundred yards."

"About that, I should say. What of it?"

"Wait. The black-bearded fellow—the kidnapper—who visited Mr. Stapleton

last night, and escaped by the ruse of being arrested by one of his confederates, will arrive at Mr. Stapleton's house at eight o'clock tonight."

"Mon Dieu! If that is so, we have him!"

"Not so fast. We shall not interfere with him —then."

"But, Monsieur, would you let this fellow escape? It is my duty to arrest him, as soon as he puts in an appearance."

"You are mistaken, Vernet. Your duty is to do as I instruct you. Monsieur Lefevre has placed you under my orders for the day."

Vernet laughed. "That is so," he said. "What do you wish me to do?"

"The man will come to Mr. Stapleton's house at eight o'clock, and will be given a large sum of money. He has agreed, if he is not interfered with, to have the address where the boy may be found telephoned to Mr. Stapleton within half an hour."

"Ah! Then we shall follow, and get him after he has telephoned."

Duvall laughed. "We are dealing with a far shrewder man than that, Vernet. This fellow will do no telephoning."

"Then how will he let Monsieur Stapleton know?"

"That is just what I am trying to find out. Put yourself in his place. He is known —he dare not remain in Paris—he gets five hundred thousand francs to give up the child. is it not natural to suppose that he will leave the city at once?"

"Yes. That is what I should do, in his place."

"Of course. Now I understand that the fellow will walk from Mr. Stapleton's house to the Arc de Triomphe, a distance of six hundred yards. He can do that easily in ten minutes."

"Yes."

"Once at the arch, he will stand awaiting a fast automobile, which will come

along the Champs Elysees. This automobile will stop for an instant and pick him up, then proceed at high speed along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because it will afford him the quickest and safest road out of Paris. From the arch to the Porte Dauphine is less than a mile. He can make it in five minutes. In fifteen minutes altogether then, he is outside the walls. In another fifteen minutes, he is beyond pursuit, in the country."

"But you forget, Monsieur Duvall, that he has not yet advised his confederates that all is well, and that the address of the place where the boy is hidden is to be telephoned to Mr. Stapleton."

"No, Vernet, I haven't forgotten that. In fact, I am coming to it now. Suppose you were in this fellow's place—how would you do it?"

Vernet scratched his head thoughtfully. "He might fire a pistol from the car."

"Too dangerous. The noise of the explosion would attract attention. He must work silently."

"A wave of the hand, perhaps, to someone along the street."

"Also dangerous. This fellow realizes that every possible step will be taken to capture not only himself, but his confederates. He anticipates, no doubt, that the road will be carefully watched. Why take chances, and run the risk of his confederates, at least, being arrested, when there are simpler, easier ways?"

"Such as what?"

"Do you not remember the signal, used on the Versailles road, the blue light?"

"Ah! Exactly. He will signal to some one in a house along the way."

"That would be easier and safer; but you will remember that there are no houses along the way—none, at least, in which a man of this sort could have a confederate hidden. But I should not say none. There is one, perhaps."

"Indeed, Monsieur. And what house is that?"

“Mr. Stapleton’s. Look!” He drew toward him the sheet of paper. “Here,” he placed the point of his pencil upon the black square which indicated the location of the banker’s residence, “is the house. The north window of a room on the top floor commands a view of the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, from a point some 500 feet west of the Arc de Triomphe, to where it intersects the Avenue Malakoff. Beyond there, the view is interrupted. In fact, the trees along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne are to some extent an obstruction; but at the crossing with the Avenue Malakoff there is a wide and uninterrupted view.

“But a confederate in Monsieur Stapleton’s own house?”

“Yes. The chauffeur, Fran�ois.”

“You astonish me, Monsieur. We have suspected the fellow, it is true. The very room of which you speak has been searched. We found nothing. How do you know that what you say is true?”

“Never mind how I know it—now. The point is this—Fran�ois, I fully believe, will be in that room, tonight, at eight o’clock, watching carefully the automobiles which pass the intersection of the Avenue Malakoff—”

“Not necessarily, Monsieur. We can easily prevent it, by placing him under arrest.”

“That is exactly what we must not do. Don’t you see, it is absolutely necessary, for the recovery of Mr. Stapleton’s child, that the signals go through uninterrupted?”

“Of course, I had forgotten that. And these signals?”

“Naturally I cannot tell—yet. I think, however, that the automobile for which Fran�ois will be looking will show a brilliant blue light, while crossing the Avenue Malakoff. That is, of course, if our friend the kidnapper gets safely away, without being pursued.”

“And otherwise?”

“I think the light would be red. He can make either, very simply, by means of a powerful electric searchlight—one of these pocket affairs, you know, fitted with colored glasses.”

““You interest me wonderfully, Monsieur Duvall. What next?”

“It is, of course, most important that the signal given shall be the correct one. There must be no interference whatever with this fellow’s escape —up to that point.”

“Ah—I begin to see. And what after that?”

“First, let us continue with Fran�ois. He will, I think, return a blue signal to the man in the automobile, to show that he has seen, and understood. He has the means to do so all ready, in his room.”

“And then?”

“He will make, I think, a similar signal from his south window to some one who is on watch. In the direction of Passy. This second person, who no doubt has the child in his care, will then go to a telephone, transmit the address of the house where the child is hidden, to Mr. Stapleton, and quietly depart, to join his confederate in—say—Brussels. He will run not the slightest risk of capture. If, on the other hand, that message fails to go through, the address will not be telephoned, and the child will probably be killed.”

Vernet frowned grimly. “It is a remarkable plan, Monsieur. These fellows are no bunglers. I think, however, that we shall be able to stop them.”

“How?”

“I will station myself at the Porte Dauphin with a fast automobile, a racer. When these fellows pass, I will follow them, and overtake them.”

“An excellent idea, Vernet; but how, may I ask, will you know the car, when it passes you? There are hundreds of cars on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, at eight o’clock in the evening. ‘

Vernet laughed. “I confess, Monsieur, you have me there.”

“Of course you might station a man at the intersection of the Avenue Malakoff and the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne; but I do not think he would be able to see the signal. By placing on the end of the searchlight a paper tube, the light would be invisible except in the direction in which it is pointed—and that, you will

remember, is diagonally upward. A man on the sidewalk would not see it at all."

"Then, Monsieur, I fail to see that there is anything we can do."

"There is one thing, Vernet. You forget the answering signal, from the window."

The Frenchman looked at his companion with undisguised admiration. "Sacre!" he exclaimed. "You have a mind, Monsieur Duvall, in a thousand."

"Thanks," answered Duvall, dryly. "Now, my, idea is, to have you select some point near the intersection of the two avenues, from which the window in the rear of Mr. Stapleton's house can be clearly seen. Station yourself there, tonight, with the fastest automobile you can secure. Let one man watch the window, another the vehicles passing in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. The moment you see the blue light, start after your man. He should be just across the intersection, on his way down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne."

Vernet rubbed his hands together with satisfaction. "We shall get him—never fear."

"Of course," said Duvall, slowly, "all this is pure assumption on my part, based upon what I have discovered in the chauffeur's room. It may not turn out as I say, but the chances are fifty to one that it will."

"And you, Monsieur? Where will you be?"

"I shall be in the room, with Fran�ois. I do not propose that he shall escape. And further—I do not know that I am correct, in my assumption regarding his signals to Passy. He may go out, and send the telephone message himself. In that case, I shall follow. Or he may, through some unforeseen accident, get the wrong signal, in which case I propose to overpower him, and give the right one. Suppose we go, now, and take a look at the intersection of the Avenue Malakoff and the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and see what arrangements can best be made. Also, if Mr. Stapleton is out in his car, we may be able to take a few observations from his chauffeur's window." He took up his hat, lighted a cigar, and led the way to the door.

They drove to the Arc de Triomphe in a cab, and, after dismissing it, walked slowly down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. At the intersection with the Avenue Malakoff they stopped and gazed about carefully, although in such a

way as not to attract attention. A brief inspection served to confirm all that Duvall had said. It took them some little time to locate the window in the rear of Mr. Stapleton's house; but after a time they managed to do so, and saw that it commanded an uninterrupted view of the point where they stood.

Vernet was highly satisfied, as they parted. It was deemed unnecessary for him to visit the chauffeur's room, and thereby run the risk of their being seen entering the banker's house together. Vernet departed to make his arrangements for the evening, strictly cautioned by his companion not to let Monsieur Lefevre into his secret. "It is a bet," he told Vernet. "I hope we shall succeed in winning it."

After his companion had departed, Duvall dropped in to see Mr. Stapleton. He learned that the banker was out, driving in the Bois with Mrs. Stapleton, who, overcome by anxiety and grief, had great need of the fresh air to retain her health. She was fast breaking down under the strain.

Duvall went up to have another look at the chauffeur's room. He had been unable to get a thoroughly dear idea of the view from the window, the night before, owing to the darkness.

He found everything as he had left it,—the searchlight on the dresser, the colored glass ornaments hanging from their gay ribbons. The north window overlooked with perfect clearness the intersection of the two avenues, as he and Vernet had seen them from below. The other window presented a more distant view. Nearby roofs and chimneys obstructed it in part; but between them could be seen the villas and buildings in Passy, smiling in the sunlight. The sight impressed Duvall the more strongly with the cleverness of the men he sought to arrest. Somewhere in all that maze of buildings, that wide vista of houses and trees and distant fields, Mr. Stapleton's child lay concealed, and it needed but a flash of light from this window to set him free. Passing his fingers idly along the window sill, Duvall suddenly observed two parallel scratches in the white paint, which had apparently been made with the point of a knife. He knelt down, and sighted between them. His line of vision swept clear of the nearby roofs and chimneys, toward Passy.

The detective turned from the window, a smile of satisfaction on his face, and proceeded to make a careful examination of the chauffeur's closet. It was here that he intended to lie hidden. He felt certain that, in order the better to perceive

and send his signals, as well as to escape detection from below, the chauffeur would allow his room to remain unlighted.

This, Duvall reasoned, would render it easy for him to lie concealed until the signal which would insure the safe return of the lost child had been given, after which he would call upon Fran�ois with precision and despatch. Should anything occur to prevent the chauffeur from giving the favorable signal, he proposed to give it himself.

The closet was close to the north window, and its door opened in such a way that Duvall saw at once that in the darkened room he could readily open it sufficiently to see all that Fran�ois did, without running any serious risk of detection.

He left the house at a little after noon and stopped in at a well known restaurant on the Boulevard des Italiens for lunch. He felt very well satisfied with the course that events were taking. If only he could get through with this thing, and get back to Grace, and the farm, he would be supremely happy. He became so absorbed in his thoughts that he failed to notice a gentleman who slipped quietly into the chair opposite him, until the latter leaned over and touched his arm.

He looked up suddenly. It was Monsieur Lefevre!

CHAPTER XV

THE few seconds that elapsed while Grace Duvall stood in the deserted studio in Passy, waiting for the arrival of the person who was ascending the stairs, seemed like eternities, so crowded were they with terror.

What should she do—what, indeed, could she do? A dozen plans raced madly through her brain, confusing her, baffling her with their futility.

That the missing boy was within the sound of her voice, she knew; for even as she stood trembling at the ominous footsteps on the creaking stairs, she could hear the low troubled childish moaning, coming apparently from the very air in front of her, yet affording not the slightest clue as to the boy's whereabouts.

She glanced about the room in desperation. Nearer and nearer came the creaking footfalls on the stairs. She dared not leave the room now, and thereby meet the approaching man face to face on the landing; yet to remain where she was would result only in her being obliged to make some lame and halting excuse for her presence, and go, as SDon as the man entered the room.

Even this she could not count upon. The fellow, no doubt a desperate and unscrupulous ruffian, might attack her, might detain her a prisoner until the child had been safely removed to another place, beyond all hope of discovery. All the work of the past twelve hours would come to nothing. And even should he let her go. In safety, he could not fail to suspect the reasons for her presence and warn his companions.

Clearly the only thing to do was to remain in the room, in hiding. There was but one place in which she could hope to escape instant detection—the closet. Yet even this promised but temporary safety; the man would be almost certain to open it, for some reason or other, and discover her presence.

It was her only chance, however, and she took it. Even as the footsteps of the approaching man sounded upon the landing outside, Grace flew across the room and Into the closet, closing the door softly behind her. In her haste, one arm of a velveteen coat which hung upon a hook, became jammed in the door, with the result that it would not entirely close. She realized that it was too late to remedy the trouble now, and crouched bacK, trembling with excitement.

The jamming of the door had caused it to remain slightly open, with a space half an inch broad between it and the casing. Through this, Grace could see a part of the room before her. She watched the door to the hallway intently, as it was thrown open.

The man she had seen in the pastry shop came in, several packages in his hands. These he placed upon a table, and at once began to prepare breakfast. A small alcohol lamp served for coffee, and butter, rolls, and fruit he produced from the paper bags before him. There was also a bottle of milk. Grace wondered if this was intended for the child.

The man went about his preparations silently. Grace occasionally obtained a good view of his face. .He was apparently about thirty years of age, dark and swarthy. There was something familiar about his manner, his general appearance; although what it was, she could not tell. She was certain, however, that she had seen him before.

Once or twice he made a move, as though to approach the closet; but each time it was something else that claimed his attention. Once it was to get a package of cigarettes that lay upon one of the modeling stands. Grace wondered what she would have done, had he kept on toward her, and opened the closet door.

She fell to thinking, in momentary snatches, about home, and Richard. How curious it seemed for them both to be here in Paris, separated for all these days, yet so near each other! She wondered if Richard had written to her, and what he would think, not to have heard from her. Then she remembered that after all he had been in Paris but a few days—there was scarcely time for a letter to have reached him. She thought of Unde Abe, pottering about among the flower beds, of Aunt Lucy grumbling good naturedly over her wash tubs, of Rose, singing her queer camp meeting songs in the spring twilight, of Don, and the other dogs, the chickens, and her beloved flowers, and wondered how all of them were getting along with Richard and herself both away.

Her reveries were interrupted by a sudden sound which made her start forward, tense with excitement. The man in the studio had gone for a moment beyond the line of her vision, into a comer of the room to her left. She could not see what he was doing there, and it was while waiting for him to reappear that she had fallen into her day dream.

The sound which startled her was the voice of a child, not crying, this time, but speaking clearly and distinctly. “I want to go home!” it said, in a high nervous voice. “I want to see my mamma!”

The man answered roughly, impatiently. “You can’t go now. Be quiet and come and eat your breakfast.”

He appeared suddenly in the line of view commanded by the crack in the door, and Grace saw that he held a small boy by one hand, and was leading him to the table. Here he placed him in a chair and set before him a glass of milk and a roll. “Hurry up now!” the man growled. “Eat your breakfast. I’ve got to go out.”

The man’s words set Grace’s heart to beating with renewed quickness. If the man was going out, she would be able to escape, and take the boy with her.

She did not doubt that he was Mr. Stapleton’s child. The girl’s dress which he had worn on the former occasion had been removed, and in place of it he wore a suit of dark blue, somewhat dirty and worn. His face still appeared to be very dark, and his hair, which had formerly been long and curly, was cropped close to his head. He appeared to be well, but very nervous. Grace watched him eagerly as he devoured the roll and milk.

When he had finished, the man took him by the hand and again led him to the corner of the room beyond Grace’s sight. She strained her face against the opening in the door, striving in vain to see what he was doing; but it was useless.

She heard the boy begin to object, begging the man in a querulous voice to let him go out and play. His captor, however, silenced him with a sharp word, accompanied by a blow. “Get in there, and keep quiet!” Grace heard him say, and after that all was silent. A moment later the man reappeared, put on his hat, and, going out, locked the door carefully behind him. Grace wondered if the maid had told him of her call, and thereby roused his suspicions.

She waited until she heard the front door close, and then, emerging quickly from the closet, went toward the side of the room to which the man had gone with the child.

At first sight, there appeared to be no place where the latter could have been hidden. The two walls were of gray-tinted plaster, cracked and stained with age. There was a rickety chair and a battered plaster figure of a centaur, against which

leaned an easel and a mass of sketches, covered with cobwebs and dust.

With extreme care, she examined the walls and floor. It seemed most likely that some trapdoor existed, affording an entrance to a secret closet in which the boy had been placed. A few moments' effort showed no traces whatever of such a hiding place. The floor was of planks, covered with dust, and the cracks between the boards were filled with dirt and showed nowhere evidences of having been recently moved. The walls she sounded gently with the handle of a modeling tool which she snatched up from the table; but they gave forth a uniformly solid sound.

She stood, surveying the place in perplexity. Then a sudden thought occurred to her. The ceiling! It swept low down, at the corner of the room, and above it she knew there must be an attic. She went over and began to examine the dusty plaster surface with minute care.

A sound of footsteps upon the stairs sent her scurrying back into the closet. She wondered why the man had returned so soon. Greatly to her surprise, she saw, as soon as the door opened, that the newcomer was not the one who had left her a short time before, but an older man, more heavily built. As he turned and glanced toward the side of the room where she was hidden, she saw that he wore a heavy black beard. It was the kidnapper himself—the man whom she had seen at Mr. Stapleton's house the night before!

He appeared to be annoyed, at not finding anyone in the studio, and after a moment sat down and lighting a cigar, began to read a newspaper which he drew from his pocket.

Grace watched him intently, hardly daring to breathe for fear he might hear her. An hour passed, and the air in the closet became close and hot. She felt so nervous that she could have screamed, when the door of the room suddenly opened and Durand. appeared.

The two greeted each other with a nod. "Where have you been?" the older man demanded, somewhat angrily.

"I had to get a new battery." He took a short black cylinder from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"Is the boy here?"

“Yes.”

“Good! Now listen to your instructions.” He lowered his voice, glancing swiftly toward the closed door of the room. “At eight o’clock I shall go to the banker’s house and get the money. At eight fifteen, or a little before, Fran�ois will get his signal and repeat to you. If he flashes the blue light, you will release the boy, leave the room, lock the door, and go at once to the Place du Trocadero. From the little tobacco shop you will telephone the address of this place—No. 42, isn’t it?—to Monsieur Stapleton. That will be about half past eight. Do not telephone before that. Then wait for me in front of the shop. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly. And if I get the red signal?”

“In that event, do not release the boy, but lock the door and come to the tobacco shop, as before. I will communicate with you there. Old Martelle is perfectly safe. But I do not think there will be any trouble. You will get the blue light.”

“You seem sure.”

“I am. This man Stapleton is not going to take any more chances. Once I am in the automobile, I am safe.”

“They could arrest you while you are walking to the Arc de Triomphe, after leaving the house.”

“That is true; but what would they gain. They would not get the boy, would they? And they have no evidence to show that I stole him. Further, Fran�ois reports this morning that he overheard Stapleton and his wife talking. There is to be no interference—at least not until I get away in the machine. They will follow me, of course. I fully expect it. But you know the steps I have taken to take care of that game.” He laughed grimly. “No—no—the thing is absolutely safe. We will get away without the least trouble.”

“Nevertheless, if anything goes wrong, and T do not get the red signal, what shall we do then?”

“We’ll talk that over, when the time comes. You meet me at Martelle’s.”

“But suppose you can’t be there? They might get you, you know.”

The man with the beard frowned darkly, and an evil expression c?.me over his face. “If you get the red signal, and I do not meet you at Martelle’s at half past eight, come back here, get the boy, and take him to Lavillac. And before you do so, cut off his left hand, and send it to Stapleton with a letter telling him that if I am not set free at once, you will send his head. That will bring them to terms.”

Grace shuddered as she heard the man’s words.

His companion nodded. “I understand,” he said. “But I hope it won’t be necessary.”

“It won’t. They can’t get me. I’ve planned too carefully. That American detective, Duvall, is a joke. He was out on the Boulevard du Bois de Boulogne this morning with one of the Prefect’s men. They are figuring to have an automobile at the Avenue Malakoff and follow me.” He laughed loudly. “Much good that will do them!

“How about Fran�ois?”

“Oh—in a week or two, after we are safely away, Fran�ois will sprain his wrist, and be forced to give up his position as Monsieur Stapleton’s chauffeur. He will join us in New York.”

The younger man puffed meditatively at his cigarette. “What’s become of that woman Lefevre had snooping around? Seen anything of her, since last night?”

“No. She hasn’t been about. Not much danger of her finding out anything.”

The other rubbed his chin, in deep thought. “She nearly got you, last night,” he presently remarked.

“Oh, no. Not a chance. I knew she was in the house, and I figured she would telephone to headquarters as soon as she learned who I was. All I had to do was to signal you, through the window, and the thing was done. Of course I didn’t expect the Prefect’s man to get there quite as soon as he did; but you handled him all right.” As he spoke, the man rose, went to a small mirror that hung on the wall, and carefully removed the black beard which was so distinguishing a feature of his appearance.

“Pretty hot, this thing,” he announced, as he threw It on the table. “Got anything

to drink about? I’m thirsty.”

Grace saw, as he turned toward her, that he bore a striking resemblance to the masked man who had given her the first message to Mr. Stapleton, in the room of the house on the road to Versailles. She trembled as she heard him ask for the drink. Suppose the bottle should be in the closet? She shrunk back in terror as the younger man rose and started toward her.

Her alarm was needless, however. The fellow drew open one of the drawers of a small dresser that stood on the opposite side of the room, and took out a light green bottle. “Absinthe?” he inquired.

“All right. One won’t do any harm. Don’t take any more, though.” He began to pour out the drink into a glass which stood upon the table. “When you get the signal from Fran�ois,” he went on, “you are to answer it, as usual, so he’ll know you’ve seen him. He doesn’t want to stay in his room very long—for fear he might be missed.”

“They suspect him, of course.”

“Yes. He’s being watched right along; when he’s out of the house, that is. They’ve searched his room, and all that; but they haven’t found anything.” He chuckled, and began to sip his drink. “Nothing to find.”

The other man sat down at the table, and the two began talking over their plans of escape. Grace could not hear all they said; but, as nearly as she could gather, they intended, as soon as the younger man had joined the other, to run for Brussels in the automobile. Near the frontier they would leave the machine, change their disguises, and cross the frontier on foot.. Once in Belgium, they seemed to think they would be quite safe.

It was along toward noon when the older man readjusted his disguise and left the house. “I’m going to get something to eat,” he announced. “I won’t be back. You’d better not leave the place again. I’ll send you in something, if you like.” He glanced at the rolls and milk on the table.

“It won’t be necessary. I’ve got all I need. Guess I’ll take a nap this afternoon. Well, good luck,” he concluded, as the other started toward the door. “See you later.”

“All right.” The black-bearded man passed noiselessly into the hall. “Don’t sleep too long. Eight o’clock, remember.” In a moment he was gone.

Grace watched the, other as he finished drinking his absinthe and lit a cigarette. Presently he went over to the cot and, throwing himself upon it, was soon snoring loudly.

The long hot afternoon wore itself on. Grace leaned back against the wall of the closet, weak from the nervous tension of the situation. The place was hot and close. She felt faint from lack of air, from hunger. At times she dozed off, then recovered herself with a start, and stood trembling, fearful lest she had made some noise which might attract the attention of the sleeping man.

After a time, the low complaining of the child began again, at first faint and seemingly far off, then growing in volume, until the tearful cries of “Let me out —let me out!” seemed to come from a point scarcely beyond the reach of her hand.

The child’s complaints at last awoke the sleeping man. With a muttered curse he rose, crossed the room, and disappeared from sight. Grace heard a low scraping sound, as of a panel being drawn back, and presently the man again appeared with the child, and again supplied him with bread and milk.

After he had eaten, the man gave him a magazine with bright-colored pictures in it, to amuse him, and lay on the bed, smoking. The boy sat on the floor, looking at the book.

Once or twice he tried to speak, but the man sharply bade him be quiet. About sundown, a step was heard on the stairs, and once again the boy was hastily placed in his hiding place, with threats of punishment if he cried.

The new arrival was only a model, in search of work. The man spoke to her gruffly, and informed her that he had all the models he needed. After she left, he did not again release the child, but sat, reading, for a long time.

At last he rose, took up the short black cylinder, which Grace saw was an electric searchlight, from the table, and went over and sat in the sill of the large double window which faced to the north. The window was open, and the room in darkness.

Grace pushed the door of her closet open slightly, so as to get a better view. The window was directly opposite the closet, at the other end of the room. ‘ She could see the silent figure of the watcher, silhouetted blackly against the night sky without. Off to the north were many lights—the lights of the houses toward the Champs Elysees, and the Arc de Triomphe.

For many minutes she watched, over the man’s shoulder, waiting for the signal which would set both herself and Mr. Stapleton’s boy free from their long confinement.

Presently she heard the man utter a quick oath, and saw him peer out of the window, his figure tense and rigid, a pair of field glasses held to his eyes. In another moment he had dropped the glasses, picked up his electric searchlight, and flashed a signal into the darkness.

It took him but a moment. In another he had rushed to the door, and Grace heard him turn the key in the lock and clatter down the stairs.

She crept swiftly to the window and looked out. At first she could see nothing, but a confused maze of lights. In a moment she had seized the field glasses and was nervously sweeping the horizon. Suddenly she held them still for a moment, then drew back with a cry of dismay. Far off toward the Avenue Kleber there gleamed a light, high in the upper room of a house. It shone for a few moments, steady, baleful, full of unknown terror, then winked suddenly out and was gone. She dropped the field glasses upon the floor and staggered back against the table. The light was red! She was locked in. The two men would undoubtedly be back in fifteen or twenty minutes. And then—she shuddered as she thought of what they intended to do to the kidnapped child. To herself she gave scarcely a thought. Then Richard’s face came before her eyes, and she fell upon the window seat, sobbing bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN Monsieur Lefevre touched Richard Duvall on the shoulder, in the restaurant in the Boulevard des Italiens, he was filled with a very great feeling of anxiety, although he concealed it behind a mask of pleased surprise at the unexpected meeting.

Since early the evening before he had had no word from Grace. He knew from Mr. Stapleton that she had left his house a short while after nine; but since then she had completely disappeared.

The Prefect at first thought that she had been unable to keep her identity from her husband any longer, and had joined him. He later learned from Vernet that this was not the case. Now the old gentleman began to feel seriously alarmed at her continued absence.

“How goes everything, my friend?” he asked, with an elaborate show of carelessness. “Have you found the kidnappers yet?”

Duvall smiled. “Not yet. But I expect to have them, before the evening is over.”

“Indeed! I congratulate you. Have you seen anything of Mademoiselle Goncourt?”

“No. Why?”

“I thought perhaps you might have met her. You two are after the same game, you know.”

Duvall smiled grimly. “I don’t believe she’s following the same trail that I am,” he said. “I expect to win that bet, Monsieur.”

The Prefect seemed a trifle uneasy. “The evening is not yet over, Monsieur,” he replied. “But, in any event, I hope that Monsieur Stapleton’s son will be returned to him without further delay, whoever brings about the result.”

“Come to his house tonight, Monsieur. I have arranged a little matter with Vernet which may surprise you. And then, too, we shall have to go and get the boy.” He

rose, and took up his hat. “We shall want you with us.”

“By all means. I shall be there, my friend. What hour would you suggest?”

“Half past eight, at the latest.”

“Good! I shall be there at that time. Good day, mon ami.”

“Au revoir—Give my respects to Mademoiselle Goncourt,” He left the restaurant and, going to his room at the hotel, proceeded to write a long letter to Grace. He reproached her for not having written to him. Here he had been in Paris four days, and had not heard a word from her! A letter, he felt, should have come by the very next steamer—several, in fact. He told her how greatly he missed her, how deeply he loved her, and how soon he hoped to return to her arms. And even as he wrote, Grace, half dead from fatigue, stood hidden in the closet at Passy, a mile away, watching with frightened eyes the kidnapper asleep on the pallet bed.

Duvall had arranged to be at Mr. Stapleton’s house a little before eight that night, and it still lacked twenty minutes of the hour when he ascended the steps of the banker’s residence and was ushered into the library.

Mr. Stapleton sat in grim silence, awaiting the coming of his visitor. He did not seem particularly glad to see Duvall. The latter’s apparent failure to make any headway in the matter of recovering his missing boy had caused the banker to lose confidence in his abilities.

“Good evening, Duvall,” he remarked, indifferently.

“Good evening, Mr. Stapleton. You are ready for your man, I see.” He glanced at the package of banknotes which lay at the banker’s elbow.

“Quite. You have done nothing to interfere with his coming or going, I trust.”

“Nothing.”

Stapleton glanced at the clock. “He will be here very soon, now. May I ask you to wait in my study, upstairs? It would never do for you to be here. The man might be afraid to enter.”

“No—you are right. I must not be here. But I prefer not to wait in the study. I have another plan.”

“What is it?” inquired the banker, uneasily.

“Where is Fran�ois, your chauffeur?”

“At his dinner, I believe. Why?”

“Will you kindly find out for sure? I want to go to his room.”

Mr. Stapleton summoned a servant, who told him that the chauffeur was just finishing his dinner. “You will be very careful, Duvall,” he said, anxiously. “I don’t want anything done which will alarm these fellows.”

“Oh, Fran�ois won’t see me. I shall keep out of his sight. Perhaps I had better go up now.” He nodded to the banker, and at once ascended the stairs which lead to the servants’ quarters.

At the door of the chauffeur’s room he paused. It was closed. He pushed it gently open, and in a moment was in the room. The place was quite dark; but by means of a pocket light Duvall soon found the closet, and a moment later was safely ensconced within. He left the door ajar, and to his satisfaction found that he could see through the north window without difficulty. Here he waited, until the chauffeur should arrive.

Mr. Stapleton, meanwhile, sat grimly in the library below, waiting for the coming of the kidnapper. Promptly at eight o’clock, his butler announced that the man had arrived.

“Show him in at once,” exclaimed the banker, as he rose and began to walk up and down the room.

In a moment the man came into the library. His powerful figure, his black beard, his assured manner, rendered him an easily recognized figure.

“I have come, Monsieur, as I said I would,” he remarked, calmly. “I trust you have the money in readiness.”

Stapleton stepped over to the desk and picked up the package of banknotes.

“Here it is,” he growled. “I understand that you will, in return for this money, send me word at once as to where my son is to be found.”

“Within half an hour, Monsieur, at the latest; provided, of course, I am not interfered with in my escape.”

“There will be no interference, until I get back my boy. After that, I shall spend another hundred thousand dollars, if need be, to bring you to justice.”

“That, Monsieur, is quite within the terms of our agreement. The moment you receive the address, you are free from any obligation to me. May I see the money?” He extended his hand.

Mr. Stapleton placed the banknotes in it. “Count them,” he growled, “and assure yourself that you have received the amount you demand.”

The kidnapper sat down with the utmost coolness and began to count over the notes. They were all of large denomination, and the operation consumed but a few moments. As soon as he had finished, the man placed the bundle of notes carefully in an inside pocket and rose. “The amount is correct, Monsieur,” he said. “Permit me to bid you a very good evening.” Without further delay, he bowed, took up his hat, and left the room.

At the door he glanced quickly at his watch, then strode off up the street at a rapid pace, toward the Arc de Triomphe.

For some eight or ten minutes he walked, at the expiration of which time he arrived at the Place de TEtoile, and at once crossed to the pavement surrounding the great triumphal arch.

Up and down the twelve great avenues which radiate from the Place of the Star flashed innumerable automobiles, coming and going like huge jeweled fireflies.

The kidnapper paused at a point on the very outer edge of the circular pavement which surrounds the arch, and waited, expectant, his eyes fixed upon the broad sweep of the Champs Elysees.

For some moments he stood thus, rigid, motionless. Suddenly a big black racing car swept from the line of traffic and approached the curb. The man on the sidewalk raised his hand, and made a momentary gesture. The car quivered to

the side of the street, pausing but the fraction of a second as the tall figure of the kidnapper stepped in. Another moment, and it had swept around the great arch and was flying down the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

Close behind it came a second car, which, like the first, contained but a single occupant in addition to the chauffeur. With scarcely fifty feet between them, the two machines swept down the broad street toward the intersection with the Avenue Malakoff.

In a few moments, both had reached it. But here their ways parted. The first car, turning in a quick and dangerous quadrant, swept into the Avenue Malakoff and sped southward like the wind. The second car continued on toward the Porte Dauphine. As it passed the intersection with the Avenue Malakoff, the chauffeur, unobserved by his passenger, directed a cylindrical black object toward the southern sky and held it there, motionless, until his car had disappeared in the shadow of the trees to the west.

Just inside the Avenue Malakoff lay a third car, its powerful engine shaking it from end to end with its rapid pulsations. Two men sat in the tonneau. One of them was occupied in watching a distant window in the rear of a house on the Avenue Kleber with a pair of field glasses.

The other kept his gaze fixed upon the road before him.

Suddenly the man with the field glasses turned, and pointed toward the car which was just passing from sight along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. “Quick!” he muttered “After him!”

The automobile shot forward like a racehorse under the whip, and in a moment was flying down the avenue in hot pursuit.

The foremost car was making high speed; but the one which pursued it was clearly the faster of the two. Slowly the space which separated them began to decrease. The man in the first car spoke quietly to his chauffeur, and the great car jumped forward with renewed speed.

Vernet, in charge of the pursuing car, swore softly to himself as he saw his quarry pull away from him. He had confidence, however, in the speed of his own machine, and urged his driver to greater efforts.

For several miles the two swept on, the rear car gaining slowly, in spite of the other's best efforts. They had passed the fortifications and were now in the Bois de Boulogne, and with clearer roads ahead the chase seemed likely to be a long one.

Suddenly, to Vernet's astonishment, the forward car began to slow up. In a moment the Pre" feet's men ranged alongside, and covered the solitary passenger with their revolvers.

"Surrender!" Vernet cried. "You are my prisoner."

The man in the other car looked up, and calmly began to light a cigarette. "Are you a bandit, my friend?" he inquired, calmly.

The detective was taken aback. The two cars had now come to a standstill at one side of the road, "Search him!" he said quickly to his companion.

The second man climbed into the car. Its occupant made no protest. "What do you wish with me, gentlemen?" he asked, with a sarcastic smile. "My watch—my money?"

"The searchlight, first of all," replied the detective, "with which you signaled."

The man looked at him in astonishment. "What are you talking about, Monsieur?" he inquired. "Is this then a joke?"

Vernet began to feel a trifle uneasy. This man certainly did not appear to resemble in any way the prisoner he had sought. He was a clean-shaven young man, elegantly dressed, and quite evidently a gentleman. "Do you deny," asked the detective, "that on passing the Avenue Malakoff a few moments ago you flashed a blue light toward the Avenue Kleber?"

The young man laughed. "Of course I deny it," he said. "Why the devil should I be flashing blue lights at the Avenue Kleber? And who are you, to ask me any such nonsensical questions?"

"I am an agent of the police, Monsieur. Who are you?"

"I am Anton Lemaitre, stock broker, of the firm of Lemaitre and Bossard." He handed a card to the dumbfounded Vernet. "I am trying a new automobile, which

I think of purchasing. My chauffeur proposed that we try it out in the Bois, where there is more opportunity to speed than in the city."

"Why did you then run away?"

"My dear sir, I saw you following me. I wish to own a fast car—the fastest car in Paris, if possible. I directed my driver to see what he could do. I do not believe, however, that I shall now buy the car, since yours is faster. What make is it, Monsieur, if I may ask?"

Vernet smothered an oath. Clearly this man was telling the truth. He directed his companion to get in with Monsieur Lemaitre. "Drive to the Prefecture," he said, "and let the gentleman tell his story to Monsieur Lefevre." He himself ordered his chauffeur to proceed with all despatch to Mr. Stapleton's house. The affair had ended in a fiasco. He felt that he must see Duvall at once.

In fifteen minutes he was at the house. Mr. Stapleton was waiting patiently in the library for the telephone call which would announce the hiding place of his boy. With him were Mrs. Stapleton and Monsieur Lefevre.

The poor man and his wife were in a pitiable state, their eyes glued to the clock which stood on the mantel. It was marked twenty-six minutes past eight. "Only four minutes more!" gasped Mrs. Stapleton, through her tears. "My God! why don't they hurry?"

Her husband endeavored to console her. "They may be a few moments late, my dear. Don't excite yourself. I am sure they will keep their word."

Vernet went over to Monsieur Lefevre and explained the events of the evening in a few words. The Prefect smiled grimly. "So Monsieur Duvall has failed again!" he remarked, in a low voice. "Mon Dieu! If we do not soon hear from Mademoiselle Goncourt, I shall begin to feel nervous myself."

Slowly the hands of the clock crept around. As the half hour was reached, and the telephone bell remained silent, Mrs. Stapleton uttered a groan of despair, and sank upon the couch, weeping pitifully. Mr. Stapleton, watch in hand, paced up and down the room. "They have been interfered with," he stormed, "or they would have communicated with me before now!" He turned to Monsieur Lefevre. "You have done nothing, I hope, to again prevent me from recovering my son?"

“Nothing, Monsieur.”

Mr. Stapleton waited another five minutes. It now wanted twenty minutes to nine. The telephone bell remained persistently silent. The banker closed his watch with a snap and thrust it into his pocket. His face was pale with rage and suffering. Drops of perspiration collected on his forehead. “The scoundrels!” he cried. “They have broken their word, and robbed me of a hundred thousand dollars in the bargain. I will give another hundred thousand to the man who will capture them, dead or alive, and find my boy!”

There was a profound silence, broken only by the quick sobbing of Mrs. Stapleton. Neither Lefevre nor Vernet ventured to speak.

Suddenly there arose sounds of a commotion among the servants gathered in the hall without. In their devotion to their employer they had collected there to welcome the lost boy. There were exclamations, cries of astonishment—and dismay.

The occupants of the room turned in surprise toward the door. As they did so, Richard Duvall appeared in the doorway. He staggered, and with difficulty supported himself by clutching the side of the door. His face was covered with blood, his clothes torn and disheveled.

He swayed a moment, unsteadily in the door.

“What is it—what is wrong?” cried Stapleton, starting toward him.

“The child is at 42 Rue Nicolo, Passy,” gasped the detective, then fell heavily upon the library floor.

CHAPTER XVII

RICHARD DUVALL, waiting with nervous impatience in the closet in Fran�ois' room, at last heard a soft and guarded step upon the stairs. He drew back, his muscles tense, and gazed fixedly at the door.

Although the room was dark, the glow of the street lamps from without, the faint light of the evening sky, sufficed, now that his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, to enable him not only to recognize the chauffeur as he entered the room, but to follow his movements with little or no difficulty.

The man seemed hurried. He grouped his way to the dresser at the opposite side of the room, and felt about for the searchlight which Duvall knew lay within easy reach.

Having secured it, he directed it for a brief moment upon his watch, noted the time, then, going to the door, opened it, and began to listen intently.

The detective at once surmised that he was listening for the departure of his confederate, the man with the black beard.

Presently the chauffeur drew back, closing the door with a grunt of satisfaction, and once more approached the dresser. Duvall concluded that he had gone to get the colored glasses by which he would be able to make the required signals.

In a moment he returned to the window, and Duvall saw him place the two glass cups upon the sill, and lean out expectantly.

It seemed a long time before he stirred. The detective, looking over his shoulder, found that his line of vision was interrupted so that he could not see the lights which flashed past the entrance of the Avenue Malakoff. He was forced to content himself with keeping a close watch upon the chauffeur.

Suddenly the man, by an almost instantaneous movement, clapped one of the little glass cups over the end of the tube which formed the searchlight, and directed it toward the street. Duvall could not tell whether the signal was blue, or red. He had every reason to believe, however, that it was the former.

The chauffeur held the tube upon the window sill for a few seconds only, then withdrew it, and started to cross the room toward the south window. As he did so, he swept the light into the room, and for an instant it fell upon the crack in the closet door through which Duvall was peering. He was conscious of a blinding blue radiance, close to his eyes, and the sudden flash caused him to draw back with a quick and involuntary movement. He realized that the chauffeur had not seen him, and that, in a few moments more, the signal would be given which would bring untold happiness to both Mr. Stapleton and his wife.

The momentary recoil, however, was fatal to his plans. Although he moved his head but a fraction of an inch, the suddenness of the movement was sufficient to cause a metal coat hanger, which hung, empty, from a hook, to click sharply against its neighbor.

The chauffeur spun around with the quickness of a cat, and, grasping the knob of the closet door, threw it open. In his hand he still clutched the tube of the searchlight.

Duvall at the same moment reached for the revolver which lay in a side pocket of his coat. He realized instantly that, now that his presence had been discovered, the chauffeur would of course not send the signal to his confederates in Passy which would result in the telephoning of the address to Mr. Stapleton, but would on the contrary flash a red signal, which the detective fully believed would result in the child’s death.

It was imperative that this should be prevented. Duvall had determined to be present in the chauffeur’s room for two reasons,—first, to send the favorable signal to Passy himself, should things go wrong, and the chauffeur receive a red flash from the street; secondly, to arrest Fran�ois in the act of receiving and sending the signals.

He now realized that he must do both, and that, too, without a moment’s delay.

As the chauffeur threw open the door he flashed the blue light full upon the crouching figure of the detective.

The latter, revolver in hand, commanded him sharply to throw up his hands.

The chauffeur did so—thereby directing the light of the electric lamp toward the ceiling. The sudden change from the glare which an instant before had been in

his eyes, to almost total darkness, left Duvall momentarily blind. His eyes could not instantaneously respond to the withdrawal of the light. The figure of the chauffeur appeared but a dark and formless shadow.

The latter, however, not having faced the glare of the light, was able to see without difficulty. With lightning like quickness he spun around on one foot, until his back instead of his face was toward the detective. Then his right foot rose, in the famous and deadly blow of the savate.

It has been said that this backward kick, so dear to the heart of the Parisian crook, is more to be feared than any possible onslaught in good old Anglo-Saxon style with the fists. Certainly in this instance it was too much for Richard Duvall. The unexpected blow, coming during the moment when the sudden darkness had left him blinded and confused, sent him crashing back into the depths of the closet, buried beneath a mass of clothing. His arms, entangled in falling coats and waistcoats, were helpless. The revolver flew from his hand, and lay useless on the floor.

The chauffeur went about his business calmly. His first move was to direct the searchlight carefully into the interior of the closet, slipping the blue cup from the end of it as he did so and allowing it to fall unheeded to the floor. His second was to draw a long and peculiarly deadly looking knife.

His quick eye saw at once that the revolver was no longer in the detective's grasp. His searchlight enabled him to discern it, lying on the floor to one side of the closet. Before Duvall could extricate himself from the articles of clothing in which he was entangled, Fran[illegible]ois had stooped quickly, picked up the revolver, and slammed the door of the closet upon him. As he struggled to his feet, the detective heard the click of the key as it turned in the lock. He was a prisoner.

Without losing a moment, the chauffeur tossed the revolver upon the table, took up the cup-shaped bit of red glass, fitted it to the tube of the searchlight, and, going to the south window, placed it upon the sill in such a way that its crimson glare was directed almost due south. It was evident that the position in which the light was placed was marked by the two tiny scratches cut in the woodwork of the window sill. In a moment he had turned back toward the closet door.

Duvall, meanwhile, realized that only by instant and superhuman effort could he hope to remedy the frightful situation which his unlucky movement had

precipitated.

He braced his shoulders and back against the rear wall of the closet, put his two feet against the door, and with every atom of strength in his body strove to force it open.

His movements had been quick. Just as the chauffeur turned back from the window toward the room, Duvall, his muscles knotted with effort, drove the full force of his body against the closet door.

The lock, a cheap affair, was torn loose in a twinkling, and an instant later the two men had grappled in the center of the room.

The detective's one desire was to get to the window, remove the red light which he knew was flashing its fateful message across the housetops, and substitute for it a blue light, which he hoped even now might shine forth in time to redeem the situation.

This, however, the chauffeur was equally determined to prevent. He realized that he was caught, that his complicity in the affair was known, and that he must warn his comrades of his danger, so that, by refusing to give up the boy, they might effect his release. He was fighting for his liberty as desperately as Duvall was fighting for that of Mr. Stapleton's child.

The two men were evenly matched. The chauffeur was perhaps the stronger, in shoulders and arms, due to his profession. The constant grip upon the steering wheel had given to his upper body muscles like steel.

The detective, though somewhat less powerful in this direction, was stronger in the back and legs. He had been an athlete, at college, and his recent life upon the farm at home had toughened and hardened him from head to foot.

He rushed at his opponent, threw his arms around the latter's waist, and strove to lift him and throw him to the floor.

The chauffeur at the same time got his right arm about Duvall's throat, and with his left did his best to gouge out one of the latter's eyes. His was the style of fighting that considers not means, but results.

For a moment they swayed heavily about the room, the detective burying his

face in his opponent's side to protect his eyes, and at the same time striving with all his might to force him back toward the bed.

Fran�ois, however, fought well. He began to compress his adversary's throat in a choking grip of wrist and forearm which threatened to put an end to the struggle in short order. At the same time his left thumb continually sought the detective's eyes.

Suddenly it reached one of them. Duvall felt a blinding sense of pain as the thumb nail sank into the soft and tender muscles about the eye. The shock was fatal to the plans of the chauffeur; for it raised up in his opponent a great and deadly rage, that for an instant gave him the strength of a madman. He raised his opponent from the floor as though the latter had been a child, broke the grip upon his throat by straightening his head, and with a mighty heave hurled him to the floor.

The fellow struck upon his side, his temple crashing loudly against the wooden floor. Duvall stood over him for an instant, breathing heavily, convulsively, then turned and snatched the searchlight from the window sill and threw it upon the bed.

There was a trunk against the wall of the room, near the window, and about It a broad leather strap. Duvall tore the strap from its place, and in a few moments had fastened it about the chauffeur's arms and body.

A towel, knotted about his ankles, rendered him helpless. Then the detective began to search upon the floor for the bit of blue glass.

In his heart there was no joy at the victory he had just won. He had captured one of the kidnappers, it was true; but on the other hand he had, by his own carelessness, prevented the safe return of the kidnapped boy to his parents.

He pictured the father and mother, patiently waiting below for the telephone message which would never come, and wondered how he would dare to tell them the truth.

At last his nervous fingers closed upon the little glass cup, where it had rolled under the edge of the dresser when Fran�ois had thrown it down Trembling with haste, he fixed it to the searchlight which he took from the bed, and, with a hopeless feeling, approached the window, and began to wave the light frantically

in the direction of Passy.

For several moments there was no response. As a matter of fact, he scarcely expected any. Then all of a sudden he saw a faint red gleam, like a star, flash from the distant night, and then go out.

He stood, helpless, waiting for it to reappear, hardly daring to hope that it would do so. Suddenly it shone again, this time for a longer period, and then disappeared. He wondered what it meant, and was scarcely surprised when the light again flashed, this time making five quick flashes, which he instantly recognized as Morse code for the letter ‘T.” There was a brief interval, then once more the signals began to flash. This time he read them without difficulty. There were four letters, spelling the word “Help.”

For an instant he leveled the tube of the searchlight toward the point from which the flashes came, guiding it by the scratches on the sill, and began pressing the button which turned the light on and off. “Where are you?” he spelled out, then waited fearfully for the reply. He dared send no other message. The person at the other end, the one who sent this ominous word, “help,” must be one of the kidnappers; yet why should he signal for assistance? He could make nothing of the matter, but he reasoned that anyone calling for help would be sure to give their location, otherwise how could they expect to receive it.

For a moment the red flashes began again, and this time he began to get the numbers. There were four quick flashes and a long dash, then others in rapid succession: “4’-2-R-u-e-N-i-co-l-o, P-a-s-s-y,” the message read. C-o-m-e q-u-i-c-k.t Y

Duvall’s head reeled, as he spelled out the words. He had not realized until now that he was wounded. The blood, pouring down his face from the great gash in his cheek, spattered thickly upon the window sill. He turned from the window, then realized that he must send some answer, to let this mysterious person at the other end of the line know that his message had been safely received.

“Will come at once. Who are you?” he spelled out, laboriously, his head spinning, his fingers trembling from weakness as he tried to stop the flow of blood from his wound.

“G-R-A.C.E D-U-V-A-L-L” came back the flashes, quick, clear cut, unmistakable.

Duvall dropped the searchlight to the floor with a harsh laugh. His brain was reeling—the whole thing became a foolish, senseless nightmare. He wondered if he was delirious, and had dreamed it all. Again he flashed a signal into the darkness. “Who are you?” he spelled out again. He did not believe that he had read the former answer aright. Evidently his imagination was playing him tricks —Grace had been on his mind so constantly, throughout the day. He wiped the blood from his eyes and stared eagerly out into the darkness. There was no response.

Then he remembered the words of the message, “Come quick.” There was no time for idle speculations as to the identity of the person who had sent him the message.

He rushed to the stairs, and with tottering footsteps descended to the library below. Fran�ois, the chauffeur, still lay, bound and unconscious, upon the floor.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR a few moments after being left alone in the studio at Passy, Grace almost lost her courage. She knew that the man who had remained on guard in the room had received the danger signal—the red light—which told him that the plans of his confederates had miscarried. She remembered the instructions which the black-bearded man had given him. “If I do not meet you at Martelle’s, take the boy to Lavillac. And before you do so, cut off his left hand and send it to Mr. Stapleton.”

The very thought of the thing made her sick. She rushed to the door, and tore frantically at the knob; but it resisted all her efforts. She glanced at the windows, knowing that to escape by means of them from her position on the top floor of the house was impossible. And then—should she escape, she would be obliged to leave the child, and this she by no means wanted to do.

Suddenly she heard again the faint moaning. The sound almost drove her frantic. She rushed to the window and looked out, praying for guidance, for some ray of hope in the frightful situation in which she found herself.

Already several minutes had passed since the departure of the man. It would not be long, she felt, before he returned, and, for all she knew, the black-bearded man with him. Would they attack her, if they found her there? She could hide again, of course; but that would not accomplish anything, except perhaps, to save herself. And she had set out to rescue the child.

In a whirl of indecision, she glanced out of the window, toward the point in the north where she had seen the red light. She wondered where it was, from what place it had been sent. Then suddenly, as she swept the horizon with eager eyes, she saw, where a few moments before the red light had flashed, a gleam of blue. Unlike the red signal, however, which had been steady, as though fixed in place, this one moved about restlessly, now pointing full at her, now almost disappearing to the right or left.

She seized the field glasses and gazed at the light in wonder. Did this mean that the kidnappers had been successful, after all, and that the former signal had been a mistake, or did it indicate that the person giving the first signal had been overpowered, and that the light was in the hands of friends?

She had no means of knowing; but here was someone who was trying to send her word that all was well. She determined to reply.

Her one thought was to get to Mr. Stapleton her present address. She knew that the man who had been intrusted with the task of telephoning it to the banker, would not now do so. She would try to send the address herself.

Then came to her a great feeling of joy, that she was familiar with the Morse code. Richard had taught it to her, during their trip from Paris to New York the year before. She remembered how she had been interested in the wireless, and Richard had offered to teach her the alphabet.

She picked up the searchlight and examined it. It was an ordinary pocket lamp, with a dry battery, such as are sold at stores dealing in electrical goods, and she saw, from its size, that it was an unusually powerful one.

Midway along one side was a tiny button, by pressing which the circuit was completed, and the light made to flash. By pressing this button momentarily, she could get a quick flash, comparable to a dot. By holding it down longer, she could produce a dash.

She did not stop to remove the red glass which was fixed over the front of the light; in fact, she concluded that it would be better to let it remain. There were many white lights all about—among them, her own would have but a small chance of being seen. But red was significant, conspicuous, indicative of danger, and that she was in grave danger she very well knew.

She decided to first send the word “help.” She knew that If the person receiving the message was a friend, he would at once ask where she was, since that would be to Mr. Stapleton and his party the most essential and important news she could give.

On the other hand, were it to be received by one of the kidnappers, he would ask her, not where she was, but what was the matter.

Painfully, fearful of mistakes, she deciphered the message which slowly flashed across the mile of night. ” Where are you.”

With trembling fingers, she spelled out her reply, giving the address and adding, “Come quick.” When she got the answer, “Will come at once,” she felt that there

was still a chance that the boy might be saved. Then came the request for her name. She gave this impatiently. What difference did it matter, so long as they came quickly.

She hastily lighted a candle which stood upon the table, then cast about her for some means whereby she might prevent the black-bearded man and his companion from entering the room, in case they should return before help arrived. There was one thing, of course, that she could do, barricade the door.

But, with the exception of the table and the light iron bed, there was nothing with which she could hope to secure it. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the great plaster centaur. It w.as a figure such as one might see in any art gallery or museum. It stood upon a plaster slab some six inches thick, which in turn rested upon a low wooden base. The figure was at least five feet high—a horse with a human torso and head. She knew that if she could jam this in front of the door, securing It in place with the bed and table, she might prevent the kidnappers from entering for some little time; long enough, she hoped, to insure the arrival of the police before they had succeeded in breaking in.

She wondered if she could manage to move the thing. At first sight, it seemed impossible, and yet the base might by chance be fitted with rollers or casters. She rushed over to the figure and began to tug at it with all her strength.

She needed but a moment to discover that she could not possibly move it; but as she bent over it, her head close to its side, she heard something which made her start with sudden joy.

It was the low sobbing of a child—the same moaning sound which she had heard from time to time ever since she had first entered the room.

At times the sound had appeared to come from afar off; at others, it had seemed to be close at hand, as though originating at some point in the very air about her.

All of a sudden the truth came to her like a flash. The child was concealed within the hollow body of the statue. The thing seemed so simple, so apparent, that she wondered that it had not occurred to her before.

She gave up her attempt to barricade the door, and began feverishly to look for the opening in the plaster cast through which the child must have entered.

It took but a few moments to find it. The whole side of the horse's body had been sawed free, by two longitudinal cuts, one along the back, the other along the belly, and two similar cuts, at the shoulder, and the flank. Heavy strips of canvas, glued across the lower cut, on the under side of the horse's belly, served as hinges, and were not visible from above.

She inserted the blade of a modeling tool which she caught up from the table, in the upper longitudinal cut, and pried the plaster side of the horse free. It fell heavily toward her, disclosing a long narrow opening; the interior, in fact, of the statue, where lay, upon a sort of bed made of an old comfort, the missing son of Mr. Stapleton.

The boy, who had evidently until a moment before been asleep, gazed up at her in surprised alarm. For over two weeks, now, he had been kept from his parents, made to move about from place to place, frightened by strange men. He had come to expect the unusual, the terrifying, and it was a scared little face that looked appealingly up at the girl as she bent over him.

For the time being she forgot the dangers which surrounded them, in her joy at the discovery of the boy. It had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly. If she could only escape, now, with the child, nothing else would matter in the least. And between her and freedom there lay but the thickness of a single door, and yet it seemed that she could not pass it.

She lifted the child from his hiding place and stood him upon the floor, then quickly swung the heavy slab of plaster back into position. At least, she reasoned, the kidnappers, when they returned, should not at once learn that their captive had escaped.

She knew that the hiding place had been but a temporary one, a means whereby the child might be kept out of sight during the day in case strangers should happen to enter the room. As soon as the kidnappers returned, they would, she realized, spirit the child away to some more secure retreat.

She went to the door and again shook it frantically, pulling at the knob with all her strength, without producing the slightest result. The lock was evidently a strong one—the door held firm and unyielding, though she threw against it her entire weight.

Evidently there was no hope of escape here. Then she again bethought herself of

the window. For a moment she gazed out into the darkness. The pavement was thirty feet below. No one was in sight. How could she ever reach the ground, with the child as well, even if she had possessed a rope? The thing was impossible.

Clearly there was nothing to do but wait. Possibly the assistance she expected from her friends, or the police, would arrive very soon—surely she could in some way keep the kidnappers occupied until then!

And suddenly she realized that the time had come. She heard the door of the house close softly, and upon the stair the sound of mounting footsteps.

Which was it, the police, or the kidnappers? The latter, she felt morally certain, since the former, in their haste to rescue the child, would beyond any question have arrived in an automobile, and at top speed.

The newcomers were mounting the stairs in a leisurely manner, as though free from any anxiety. Grace heard them pause for a moment on the first landing, then start up the second flight of stairs. It seemed to her out of the question, to stand in the middle of the room and await their entrance. At least she could postpone the fatal moment a little while, by hiding, with the boy, in the closet. She stepped into it, the child's hand in hers, and drew the door shut, just as the two men entered the room. On her way, she hastily blew out the candle.

They were the same two men that she had seen before,—the black-bearded man, now without his beard, and the artist, Durand. She saw this, as soon as the latter had relit the candle. She wondered if he would notice that the wick was still warm. Evidently he did not; for they threw themselves into chairs, lit cigarettes, and began to talk.

"Now we can speak freely," said Durand. "How did things go?"

"I got the money—gave the blue signal, and expected to be halfway to Brussels by now. What nonsense is this about a red light?"

"It is no nonsense, I assure you. I saw it with my own eyes, as plain as day."

"Then Fran ois must have made a mistake, or else he has been placed under arrest—the latter, no doubt. Now the question is. What shall we do? I think we ought to get out of Paris as soon as possible. It isn't safe to stay here." He looked

about him nervously.

“Why not? You didn’t telephone Monsieur Stapleton this address, did you?”

“No, naturally not.”

“Then I don’t see but what we are quite safe. No one knows the child is here.”

“Then you don’t intend to give him up?”

“Not yet. I must first find out whether or not Fran�ois is in trouble.”

“Let him look out for himself.”

The older man frowned. “Since when, my friend,” he asked, “have I been in the habit of deserting -my comrades? Fran�ois must go free, or Mr. Stapleton does not get his boy. That’s flat. The first thing is to send his father something that will let him see that we mean business.”

“We’ve got to be sure about Fran�ois, first.”

“I’ll find that out, tonight. My plan is this. We must first get the child away to Lavillac’s place. This is too unsafe, here. Anyone might come in.”

“They’d have difficulty in finding the hiding place.” The younger man grinned.

“That’s all very well; but the other place is safer. And then—Lavillac’s woman can look after the brat while we are away. What a pity Fran�ois had to get into a mess at the last moment! I hoped to be rid of the boy, by now.” The older man rose and began striding up and down the room.

“Well,” he said at length, sharply, “we might as well get along. I move thai we wrap the boy in a coat, take him down to the car, run quickly out to Lavillac’s place, leave him there, and start for Brussels at once. The rest we can do by ‘phone. Fran�ois set free—the boy the same. Meanwhile, we’ve got to show this man Stapleton we mean business; so we’d better arrange to send him one of the kid’s hands at once. If we don’t, he’ll have the whole Paris police force after us.”

“All right. I’ll get him out.” He strode quickly over to the statue, pulled out the

side, and gazed blankly into the empty space before him.

“Sacre! The child’s gone!” he exclaimed, excitedly. “Somebody has been here—in this room —since I left it, half an hour ago.”

“The door was locked.”

“I know; but somebody’s been here, nevertheless, for the child is gone.”

“He may not be gone, Durand. It is true that he is no longer in the horse; but he may be in the room, for all that. Search the closet.”

The man named Durand stepped quickly to the closet door. “Not much chance,” he grumbled. “And if the police knew that he was here, and have spirited him away, they may even now be waiting to spring a trap of which you and I are the rats. For all we know the place is surrounded at this very moment.”

“Then the sooner we get away from it the better. Search the closet. If he’s not there, we’d better make tracks for the frontier as quickly as possible. We can do nothing more without the child. Fran�ois will have to look out for himself.”

Durand went impatiently up to the closet door and flung it open, then both he and his companion recoiled in surprise as Grace stepped out, holding the child by the hand.

“Mon Dieu!” gasped the two men in unison.

The one who had worn the black beard was the first to recover himself. “Quick!” he cried, motioning toward Grace. “The woman is a detective. Tie her up, and let’s get away at once. No doubt she has sent word to her friends. We can’t afford to stay here another minute.” He seemed greatly excited and, rushing to the window, inspected the silent street below.

Durand, meanwhile, had thrown himself upon the girl, seized her hands, and with a quick motion had secured them with a bit of cord he snatched from within the closet.

She offered no resistance, made no outcry. Both seemed equally useless. The boy stood by, watching the scene in childish wonder. So many queer things had happened to him, however, during the past few days, that he, too, remained

silent.

In a moment the older man withdrew his head from the window, rushed to the closet, and drawing out a long gray coat, wrapped it about the child. “You will come along with us, Mademoiselle,” he said sternly. “Make no attempt to escape, if you value your life.”

“But what do we want with her?” the younger man asked, impatiently.

“You fool! Would you leave her here, to give our description to the police? It would mean certain capture in a few hours. This woman has got to be put where she can do no harm until we are safely over the frontier. It may be wiser to silence her altogether. We’ll decide about that when we reach Lavillac’s. The first thing is to get out of this house without losing a moment’s time. Come!” He started for the door.

As he did so, Grace heard, far off, the steady throbbing of an automobile. She felt a wave of hope sweep over her. It might be her friends, coming to her assistance. If so, they might yet arrive in time.

The two men evidently also heard the sound. “Hurry—hurry!” the older one urged, as they began to descend the stairs. “They may be on us at any moment. Go out the rear way.”

Grace heard the sounds of the approaching automobile growing more and more distinct. In another minute it would stop before the door of the house. But in that minute her captors would not only have been able to descend the stairs, but would already be making good their escape through the garden at the rear of the building.

She must do something, she knew, to prevent this; but what—what? Bound as she was, how could she hope to prevent the escape of these men. She looked ahead of her, to where, a step or two in advance, the man of the black beard was hastily descending the stairs, the boy firmly held in his arms. Behind her came his companion, candle in hand, close at her heels.

They were within half a dozen steps of the lower hall. From this she could see a dark passageway, leading to the rear of the house. Already the noise of the automobile without told her that it was stopping at the door. She heard the sound of rapid footsteps on the sidewalk; yet realized that, before her friends could

break in, their quarry would have flown.

Without a moment's hesitation she sprang forward, throwing her whole weight upon the man in front of her.

The sudden shock, as she precipitated herself upon his shoulders, threw him off his balance, and he pitched forward headlong into the hallway below. The two of them, together with the child, rolled in a tangled heap to the floor. The second man, candle in hand, stopped on the stairs and gazed helplessly down, not realizing for a moment what had happened.

"Help! Help!" Grace screamed at the top of her voice, as she struggled to regain her feet, and at the same moment there came the sound of heavy blows upon the front door.

The man who had been carrying the child rose to his feet with an oath, just as his companion joined him. He turned on Grace with a howl of fury, and struck her a quick blow in the face. She had a confused vision of fleeing men, the dancing light of a candle, a rush of fresh air, and then all was blotted out in a wave of oblivion.

CHAPTER XIX

THE startling and dramatic entrance of Richard Duvall into Mr. Stapleton's library, ending with his announcement of the whereabouts of the kidnapped child, and his subsequent collapse, threw the entire party into confusion.

Mrs. Stapleton started up with a scream, her overwrought nerves no longer able to resist the frightful strain under which she had for so many days been laboring.

Her husband, who had completely forgotten the detective's presence in the house, in his anxious vigil at the telephone, called out instantly to one of the servants, ordering him to tell Fran�ois to bring his automobile to the door.

Monsieur Lefevre, accompanied by Vernet, sprang quickly to Duvall's assistance. The Prefect felt that, if the latter's statement was correct, he had won out in the long duel for the honor of recovering the kidnapped child; but no consideration of this nature could make him any less concerned for the detective's welfare, or any the less thankful that, no matter by whose efforts, the missing child had at last been located. He had hoped that to Grace Duvall would ultimately fall the prize of success; but these things were, after all, of no serious weight, compared with the great fact, that the success had at last come.

Assisted by Vernet, he placed Duvall upon a couch, and called for brandy, and a basin of cold water.

In a few moments, under Vernet's skilful ministrations, the detective's wound had been washed and temporarily bound up, and he had been restored to consciousness. A little of the brandy soon served to dispel his faintness. He declared himself ready to accompany the expedition to Passy.

The Prefect endeavored to dissuade him; but to no purpose. The message which he had received in the chauffeur's room, to the effect that the person calling for help was Grace Duvall, his own wife, seemed so mysterious, so utterly inexplicable to him, that he could conceive no reasonable explanation for it. There was but one thing to do,—to go himself and sift the matter to the bottom. He did not expect to find Grace there, and yet—what else could the message mean?

Just as he staggered to his feet, with the announcement that he would accompany the party to Passy, two of the servants rushed into the library, and with scared faces announced that Fran�ois lay, bound and unconscious, on the floor of his room. Mr. Stapleton looked quickly at Duvall.

“It’s all right, Mr. Stapleton,” exclaimed the detective. “The fellow is one of the gang.” He turned to Monsieur Lefevre. “You’d better have him placed under arrest at once. And if your car is here, we’ll use that, instead of Mr. Stapleton’s. There’s not a moment to be lost.”

“By all means. My automobile is at the door. Vernet,” he turned to his assistant, “have one of your men take charge of this fellow Fran�ois at once. We must set out immediately.”

Mr. Stapleton took his wife in his arms, and embraced her tenderly. “Don’t worry, dear,” he said. “I’ll be back with the boy, inside of half an hour. Come along!” he shouted to the others, as he made for the door. “No time to waste now.”

In a few moments the entire party, consisting of Mr. Stapleton, Duvall, Monsieur Lefevre, Vernet, and the Prefect’s chauffeur, were driving toward Passy at a rate which set at naught all speed regulations and sent the few pedestrians who happened to cross their path scampering to the sidewalk for safety.

Duvall explained, as they went along, the mysterious messages which he had received by flashlight. No one understood them but Monsieur Lefevre. He gave a great sigh of relief. The continued and unexplained absence of Grace had alarmed him greatly. Now he began to understand the reasons for it. That part of Duvall’s story which spoke of haste, the appeal for prompt assistance, made him look grave. He leaned over to his chauffeur and urged him to even greater speed.

The trees and houses along the Avenue Kleber, and later the Rue Franklin, swept by the speeding machine in a whirl of dust. In what seemed an incredibly short time the automobile dashed into the Rue Nicolo, and thundered up to No. 42.

Vernet was the first to ascend the steps of the house, closely followed by Duvall and the others of the party. As they reached the front door, and rapped loudly, they all heard a sudden commotion within, followed by cries and shouts and a fall. Instantly all four threw their combined weight against the door, shattering the lock and bursting it in.

The semidarkness showed a terrifying spectacle. On the floor lay a woman, unconscious, clutching in her arms a child, trapped in a long gray coat. Down the dark hallway leading to the rear of the house dashed the figures of two men. One of them turned, as the attacking party entered, and hurled the lighted candle which he bore full into their faces. The entire scene was instantly plunged into darkness.

The momentary light of the candle, however, had been sufficient to send a thrill of joy through at least one of the entering party. Mr. Stapleton recognized, in the white and tearful face of the child, his kidnapped boy, and, stooping, raised him tenderly in his arms.

Duvall, not knowing whether the unconscious woman was the supposed agent of the police, Mademoiselle Goncourt, or Grace, his wife, lifted her in his arms and carried her out into the air.

Vernet, followed by the Prefect, and the chauffeur, who had at once joined them, dashed fearlessly along the dark passage by which the two men were attempting to escape.

There was a crash, as the rear door was burst out, followed by a volley of shots as Vernet opened upon the fleeing men with his automatic revolver.

In a moment the affair was over. The foremost of the two men crumpled up before he had taken half a dozen strides through the garden, and his companion raised his hands and surrendered, begging for mercy. Within a few moments he was handcuffed, and Vernet, bending over his wounded companion, was directing the chauffeur to summon an ambulance at once.

Monsieur Lefevre returned hastily to the street. His sole concern now was for Grace. He prayed fervently that no serious harm had befallen her, and realized that Duvall was likely to resent bitterly the deception which has been practised upon him.

The latter, however, was in no mood for recriminations. No sooner had he carried his unconscious burden?o the street, when Grace opened her eyes, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him.

“Richard—Richard!” she cried, happily. “I’m so glad—so glad!” then rested content in his arms.

The detective's brain was in a whirl—in no possible way could he account for the presence here, in Paris, under such tragic and inexplicable circumstances, of the wife whom he had left, so short a time before, peacefully sitting on the rose-covered porch of their home in Maryland. The thing seemed incredible, unbelievable; yet here was Grace, with her soft arms about his neck, her kisses on his lips, to prove its reality.

He looked at Monsieur Lefevre dully as the latter joined them upon the sidewalk, but could say nothing.

"It seems," remarked the Prefect, with a grave smile, "that not only has Mr. Stapleton found his boy, but you have found your wife."

Duvall frowned. "What is she doing here?" he asked.

"We will speak of that later, my friend," observed Lefevre, quietly. "Just at present I propose that we return to Mr. Stapleton's without a moment's delay. Her heart is. breaking with anxiety." He took Grace's arm and assisted her to enter the automobile, where Mr. Stapleton had already preceded them with his son. "It i$ to you, my dear child," he said to Grace, as she sunk weakly back upon the cushioned seat, "that Mrs. Stapleton will owe all her happiness."

It was a cheerful party that broke in upon the banker's wife a short time later. Duvall, under the stimulus of Grace's presence, had completely forgotten his wound; while Grace, who had been but momentarily stunned by the blow which the kidnapper had given her, was radiant with joy at once more feeling her husband's arms about her.

Monsieur Lefevre carried them both off to his house, as soon as the boy had been restored to his mother. The happiness of the banker's reunited family was too great to permit them to be even mildly interested in the affairs of Richard Duvall and his wife, and they, too, wished to be alone. It seemed to them both as though ages had passed since they had seen each other; they could scarcely realize that it had been but a little over two weeks. Richard especially seemed unable to grasp the truth of the situation. He plied Grace with numberless questions, and could scarcely believe that he had actually been within arm's length of her on at least four different occasions during the past week without knowing it.

Monsieur Lefevre advised him to leave the whole matter until the next day. "You

should be proud of your wife, Monsieur," he said, gravely. "But for her, I doubt if Monsieur Stapleton would ever have seen his boy again. And that reminds me," he smiled mischievously, "that I have won that little bet. It was Mademoiselle Goncourt, of my office, that recovered the lost child."

"I think the honors are pretty evenly divided, Monsieur," laughed Grace, happily, as she pressed her husband's hand. "Don't forget that if Richard hadn't gotten my message, all my work would have gone for nothing."

"Suppose we call it a draw, then," said the Prefect. "All in the family, as you Americans say. And to show that I am not prejudiced, one way or the other, I suggest that you both, with Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton, dine with me tomorrow evening. There are many points connected with this case which are by no means cleared up, and we should talk them over. Although we have secured the missing child, and three of the kidnappers, we do not yet know how the child was stolen, or f whether the nurse, Mary Lanahan, is innocent or guilty of any part in his mysterious disappearance in the Bois de Boulogne. I confess that I have all along considered her guilty, and am inclined to order her arrest at once."

"It will be useless, Monsieur," remarked Duvall, quietly. "She is entirely innocent."

"You mean that she knows nothing of how the boy was spirited away?"

"Nothing!"

"Mon Dieu! Then the thing may forever remain a mystery."

"Not at all. It is simple enough."

Monsieur Lefevre turned to him with a look of inquiry. "You mean, then, that you have solved it?"

"I do."

"Then may I ask that you will be good enough to explain it at once?"

Duvall laughed. "Monsieur Lefevre," he said, "I have a splitting headache, a bad wound in my cheek, and a burning desire to spend the next two hours talking to my wife." He drew Grace toward him, and put his arm through hers. "I am very

much afraid that the explanation of the disappearance of Mr. Stapleton’s boy will have to be put off until tomorrow.”

Monsieur Lefevre watched the two as they went, arm in arm, up the stairs.

“Mon Dieu!” he said softly to himself. “They are just as much in love with each other as ever.”

CHAPTER XX

“I MUST confess,” remarked Monsieur Lefevre, as he sat with Mr. Stapleton and Duvall over their after dinner cigars the following evening, “that while the case as a whole appears simple enough to me, there are one or two points that I fail to understand.”

“There are a great many that I fail to understand,” exclaimed the banker, chewing reflectively on his cigar. “However, now that the boy is safe at home, it really makes very little difference.”

“On the contrary, Mr. Stapleton,” remarked Duvall, “it makes a great deal of difference. For instance, I understand that you have discharged the nurse, Mary Lanahan.”

“Yes. You say that she is quite innocent of any part in the kidnapping of my boy; but the fact remains that I don’t trust her. I am informed that she was married to that fellow, Valentin, this afternoon.”

Duvall smiled “That was quite to be expected.”

“At one time,” said Mr. Stapleton, “you believed this fellow Valentin to have been concerned in the plot.”

“Yes. That is true. My early investigations of the matter showed me at once that there was some understanding between these two, something which they were endeavoring to conceal. I did not at first understand the motive which actuated them. I thought it was guilt. In reality, it was love. Therefore I am not surprised to learn of their marriage.” He gazed critically at his cigar for a time, in silence.

“As matters have turned out, gentlemen,” he resumed, after a few moments, “there is no cause for anything but congratulation on all hands. The child is recovered, the criminals are under arrest, the money—the hundred thousand dollars you paid out, Mr. Stapleton—was found on the kidnapper’s person and returned to you.”

“Exactly. Nothing could be more satisfactory all around.”

“And yet,” went on the detective, “I have never before taken part in a case in which I have done so little, in which I have been so uniformly unsuccessful.”

Mr. Stapleton raised his hand. “My dear Duvall,” he began, “but for you, we should have been nowhere.”

“You are wrong, my friend. Had I kept out of the case altogether, your son would have been returned to you just the same. It is true that the men who kidnapped him would not have been caught, and your money would not have been returned to you; but the prime object which you sought, the recovery of your child, would have been realized in any event.”

“That is true,” remarked the Prefect; “but, from the standpoint of the police, it is the detection and capture of the criminal that is desired, not the buying of him off. By insisting on that, Mr. Stapleton, you rendered our work extremely difficult.”

“So difficult, indeed,” said Duvall, earnestly, “that but for the energy, the courage, the wit of a woman, all our plans would have failed. I refer to my wife. It is to her that all the credit in this affair is due.”

“By all means!” said Mr. Stapleton. “I could not fail to realize, when she told her story at dinner tonight, how much Mrs. Stapleton and myself owe her. I shall have something to say on the subject of our debt, as soon as the ladies rejoin us. But tell us, Mr. Duvall, a little more about the case, as you now understand it. I confess that I am becoming more and more interested. What, for instance, was the mystery, if indeed there was any, connected with the box of gold-tipped cigarettes?”

Duvall smiled. “That, my dear-sir, is in fact the crux, the starting point, of the whole affair.” He settled back in his chair comfortably. “Otherwise the case was simple enough. Certain scoundrels steal a child, hold it for ransom, and frighten the parents into paying over a large sum. Nothing unusual in that. A clever scheme or two for turning the money over, and returning the child—simple, yet perfect enough to defy all attempts to foil them.

“The real mystery lay in the utter absence of any clues which would throw light on the actual stealing of the child. In this respect the case was unique. A trusted nurse swears that the child has disappeared in broad daylight, without the slightest knowledge of how it was accomplished. Here we have a case so simple,

so devoid of Incident of any sort, that we are baffled at the very start by the impossibility of the thing. Yet the nurse is a woman of good reputation, honest, clearly telling what she believes to be the truth.

“But a single clue existed upon which I could build the least semblance of a case. I refer to the half-smoked cigarette with the gold tip, which I discovered in the grass at the scene of the crime. Without that apparently trivial clue, the criminals would in all probability never have been captured at all.”

“But,” exclaimed Mr. Stapleton, “I don’t see how you make that out.”

“Nor I,” observed the Prefect.

“No. I suppose not. And yet, it is simple enough. That half-smoked cigarette and nothing else is the basic reason for the arrest of the three men now in your hands.”

Monsieur Lefevre smiled. “Be good enough,” he said, “to explain.”

“Very well, I will. But first, let me indicate to you my course of reasoning. When I originally found the cigarette, I regarded it as of very small value, from the standpoint of evidence. It happened to be lying in the grass at the point where the crime occurred; but during the week or more which had elapsed between the stealing of the boy and my examination of the ground, a hundred people might have walked over the spot. I took it, because I realized that it might have a bearing on the case, and I have learned to discard no clue, however trifling it may appear, until it has been proven valueless.

“Now to go back to the cigarette, I observed at once that it was of American make, yet of such small size as to have been either used by a woman, or by a man of rather effeminate taste.

“Now if the cigarette had been used by a woman, it meant one of two things. Either it was used by Mary Lanahan herself, in which case it apparently proved nothing, or by some other woman who was there with her, and who might have had a hand in the kidnapping.

“On the other hand, if used by a man, it pointed clearly to the chauffeur, Valentin, for several reasons. He was a friend, a former lover, of the nurse. He had been discharged by Mr. Stapleton for dishonesty. He was, I had reason to

know, of rather a weak and effeminate type. The cigarette was of American make, and he had but recently come from America. These things pointed to Valentin. The fact that the nurse was in love with him would cause her to shield him. I determined to try the matter out at once.

“As soon as I returned to the house, therefore, I confronted her, and asked her if Valentin smoked gold-tipped cigarettes. I did this, not because I expected to get any reply of value, but because I wished to observe her manner, her face, when I flung the question at her.

“She was greatly startled. She denied that Valentin smoked. Fifteen minutes later, she sent him a message to destroy the cigarettes.

“I at once concluded that they were working together, and were both guilty, a conclusion in which, however much I was justified by the evidence, I was quite wrong.

“Then came the attempt on the part of someone—the man with the black beard, I am told—to steal the cigarettes from Valentin. I learned that the man was followed to Mr. Stapleton’s house.

“This at once threw a new light upon the matter, although I will admit a confusing one. Someone else, besides the nurse, desired the box of cigarettes removed as evidence; someone, in fact, who belonged to, or had friends in, the house.

Who could this be? I could think of no one, outside of Mary Lanahan herself, but the chauffeur, Fran�ois.”

“Why did you first suspect him?”’ asked Mr. Stapleton.

“Because he was the only person, besides the nurse, who was present at the time of the kidnapping. I did not abandon my suspicions of either the nurse or Valentin. I fully believed that they knew a great deal more about the affair than they admitted. But I became convinced that Fran�ois, too, was in the thing. He had testified that he was asleep when the affair occurred. I concluded at once that he was lying.

“At the first opportunity, therefore, I made a thorough search of his room, and found the box of cigarettes hidden in a clock on his mantel.”

“Ha! I did not know that,” exclaimed the Prefect, “What were they doing there?”

“I concluded that the fellow with the black beard who stole them from Valentin, in order to prevent their use as evidence against him, turned them over to Fran�ois for a definite purpose.”

“And that purpose was?”

“Their use in subsequent crimes of a similar nature.”

Mr. Stapleton and the Prefect gazed at Duvall in bewilderment. “Explain yourself, my friend,” exclaimed the latter. “I confess I do not understand what you are talking about. Who, may I ask, really smoked the cigarette, the remains of which you found in the grass?”

“Mary Lanahan,” said the detective, with a smile.

“The nurse! Name of a dog! Then I fail to see that the matter is of the slightest importance one way or the other.”

“On the contrary, Monsieur, it is of the greatest importance. May I ask whether you are, by any chance, familiar with the properties of an Eastern drug, made from hemp, and generally known as hashish?”

The Prefect sat up suddenly, and clapped his hands to his knees. “Mon Dieu!” he exclaimed. “Now I begin to understand.”

“More than I do,” said Mr. Stapleton.

“The cigarettes were drugged, that is all,” went on Duvall. “The men who planned this thing went to work very carefully. They ascertained, through Fran�ois, that Mary Lanahan was in the habit, no doubt on the sly, of using cigarettes. I discovered the fact, myself, before I left New York. They also learned that she smoked the same brand as Mrs. Stapleton herself used. No doubt she helped herself from Mrs. Stapleton’s supply. They therefore secured, also through Fran�ois, a box of these cigarettes, and had them heavily drugged with hashish. The box of drugged cigarettes was substituted, later on, for her own.”

“But,” exclaimed Mr. Stapleton, “how could Mary Lanahan swear that she turned away but a moment—that no one came near her?”

“When Mary Lanahan testified that, she believed that she was telling the truth. The hashish had simply destroyed her conception of the passage of time.”

“Is that its effect?”

“Yes. It produces a delightful languor, a stupor in which all realization of the passage of time ceases. Sometimes, to those who use the drug, it may apparently require hours to walk a few yards. To make a momentary movement of the hand may seem to take many minutes. On the other hand, in the stupor which the drug induces, hours may be spent in the contemplation of a flower, a bit of scenery, the page of a book, without any realization on the part of the user that more than a few seconds have elapsed. That is what happened to Mary Lanahan. She inhaled a few puffs of the cigarette, heavily charged with the drug; without knowing, of course, of its presence. She probably passed at once into a state of stupor which may have extended over fifteen minutes or more. She was not unconscious. She sat upon the grass, looking off toward the distant sky, in a waking dream, not unlike a trance, in which all the world about her—the world of sound, of movement—had simply ceased to exist. She was to all intents and purposes unconscious of what was going on about her. The kidnapper, whom I strongly suspect to be Fran�ois, merely strolled up behind her, picked up the boy, and walked off with him.”

The detective’s listeners looked at him in astonishment. Presently Mr. Stapleton spoke. “Why do you think it was Fran�ois?” he asked.

“Oh, for many reasons. Had he, on approaching, found the nurse not sufficiently under the influence of the drug, he could have pretended to wish to speak to her, on some trivial matter. Again, the child would go away with him of course without making an outcry, which he would probably not have done, with a stranger. There are other reasons. He no doubt took the boy to the road, and handed him to his confederates, passing in another car. The affair occurred, you will remember, in a little frequented part of the Bois.

“The subsequent actions of Mary Lanahan are a trifle difficult to account for; but I suppose them to have been as follows: On slowly coming out of her stupor, and realizing that the boy was gone, she was terribly frightened. It had seemed to her but a moment since she turned away. She fears that the cigarette has made her drowsy—she has heard that they sometimes contain opium. She thinks she may have dozed off; but is not willing to admit it. Especially does she not want her

employers to know that she uses cigarettes. She fears that such knowledge would cost her her place. It is not until later that she begins to suspect the cigarettes."

"When is that?" inquired Lefevre.

"Several days later, when she is supposed to have been poisoned. She was with Valentin at the time; although, on account of Mr. Stapleton's dislike for him, she feared to admit it. She smokes another of the cigarettes, while sitting on a bench with him, in the Champs Elysees. Suddenly she is taken ill—a frequent result of hashish, when taken in excessive doses, or by one otherwise nervously upset. Valentin takes the box, puts her into a cab, and goes to his room, where he leaves the cigarettes. No doubt, as she begins to feel ill, she discusses with him the possibility of the cigarettes having been poisoned. It is for that reason that she gives them to him.

"Her sudden message to Valentin to destroy them arose from a fear that I would discover the part which they had played in the boy's loss. This would, she knew, not only cost her her place, but would make her, in a way, responsible for the entire affair. She feared Mr. Stapleton's wrath, and therefore both she and Valentin remained dumb, so far as the cigarettes were concerned.

"They both, however, were all this time doing their best to find the child. Her message to Valentin, that she was suspicious of Fran�ois, telling Valentin to watch him, arose no doubt from a realization that the box of drugged cigarettes had been substituted for her own by the chauffeur.

"Valentin, acting on her advice, does watch Fran�ois, as his presence clinging to the rear of the latter's car the other night has proved. He tells me, today, that Fran�ois did not take his car to the garage that night at alL The men there who so testified lied, at his request, supposing it merely an excuse to cover a joy ride.

"Fran�ois, not wishing that the drugged cigarettes should remain in the nurse's hands as evidence against him, evidently made an attempt to recover them, discovered that she had turned them over to Valentin, and, being watched himself, sent word of the matter to his confederate, the fellow who went about in the black beard. He must have been admitted to Mr. Stapleton's house that night by Fran�ois himself.

"I came to the conclusion, early in the course of my investigations, that the cigarette, the end of which I had found in the Bois, had been smoked by Mary

Lahahan, and I so told Mr. Stapleton."

The banker nodded. "Yes," he said; "but you did not then say anything about the hashish."

"I was not certain of it. I intended to have the fragment I had found analyzed. When I discovered the cigarettes in Fran�ois' room, you will remember that I took one of them. I smoked that cigarette, before going to bed that night. It produced exactly the sensations that Mary Lanahan must have felt. I floated away in the land of dreams for over half an hour, and came to with no recollection whatever of the passage of time. It is a remarkable drug, but an extremely dangerous one.

"After that, the case became simple enough. I knew at once, beyond any question, that Fran�ois was one of the kidnappers. My plans last night would have worked perfectly, but for the chauffeur's accidental discovery of me, hiding in the closet. Had that not happened, the boy would have been returned, according to program, and Fran�ois I had safely in my hands."

"But we wouldn't have got the others," laughed the Prefect. "You must thank your wife for that. Vernet has told me how the kidnappers outwitted you at the Avenue Malakoff . The car from which the signal apparently was made contained a well known stockbroker, who knew nothing of the matter at all. He merely happened to be passing the Avenue Malakoff at the precise moment when the signal was given to Fran�ois."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," observed the detective, quietly. "The signal was undoubtedly made from that car; not by Monsieur Lemaitre, I will admit, but by his chauffeur. He has admitted to Vernet that a stranger paid him fifty francs to do so, on the plea that it was some signal to a woman. The man knows nothing of the affair, beyond that."

As he finished speaking, there was a ripple of laughter from the hall, and Mrs. Stapleton, Madame Lefevre, and Grace came in.

"We have been debating a most important question," said Mrs. Stapleton, with an assumption of extreme gravity, "and we beg that you, Monsieur Lefevre, will be so good as to decide it."

"What is this question so grave, Madame," inquired the Prefect, rising, with a

smile. “I am all impatience to hear it.”

“The question is this, Monsieur Lefevre: Which deserves the greater credit for the recovery of my boy—Mr. Duvall, or his charming wife?”

The Prefect stepped forward, placed one hand affectionately upon DuvalFs shoulder, and with the other grasped Grace by the arm.

“The question you propound, Madame,” he said, looking from the detective to his wife with a smile, “is easily answered. The credit belongs equally to both. And that, my children, is as it should be. This affair, so happily terminated, has taught me one important lesson. It is this: The husband and the wife should never be in opposition to each other. They must work together always, not only in matters of this sort, but in all the affairs of life. I attempted a risky experiment in allowing these two dear friends of mine to attack this case from opposite sides. But for some very excellent strokes of luck, it might have resulted most unhappily for all concerned. Hereafter, should Monsieur Duvall and his wife serve me, it must be together, or not at all.” He turned to Grace. “I feel that I owe you both a great debt, my child, for having once again so rudely interrupted the course of your honeymoon. What reparation can I make? Ask of me what you will.”

“Anything?” inquired Grace, laughing.

“Anything.” The Prefect bowed gallantly.

“Then I demand your promise, Monsieur, to visit us at our place in Maryland, before the end of the year.”

“That,” exclaimed the Prefect, as he bent and kissed her hand, “would be the most delightful way of paying a debt that I could possibly imagine.”