

Le Queux William

Whither Thou Goest



William Le Queux
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Whither Thou Goest:

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Preface.

What This Story is About

The Earl of Saxham was vastly annoyed when his son, Guy, fell in love with a “penniless nobody,” and announced that he would marry her against all opposition. He determined to separate the lovers; to which end he persuaded an influential friend in the Foreign Office to secure an appointment for Guy in the Embassy at Madrid. He little knew that he was sending his son into the centre of a hotbed of anarchism, that Guy’s footsteps were to be dogged by a vindictive and revengeful woman, that his life was to hold many a thrilling moment and not a few narrow escapes.

Mr Le Queux has written a thrilling story of anarchism and its deadly secret plotting, a story through which there runs, nevertheless, a rich vein of romance.

Prologue

A hot July evening on the calm Biscayan coast of Spain.

The sun had disappeared like a globe of molten metal into the sapphire sea, and now, in the breathless blood-red afterglow which tinged the unruffled glassy waters away to the Atlantic, the whole populace of the peaceful old-world town of Fonterrabia had come forth from their houses to breathe again after the intense heat and burden of the blazing day.

Dusty green sun-shutters were being opened everywhere, while upon the golden beach the clear waters hardly rippled, for the summer tide was upon the turn. Across the bay lay a cluster of gaily-painted sardine boats in reds and greens, awaiting a breeze, and along the sea-front, so fiercely swept in winter, stood the quaint mediaeval houses, crumbling and sun-blached, with their wide overhanging roofs and many balconies, palpitating with the heat, now rapidly receding. It had been a scorching day in Spain.

In the stunted tamarisks which sprang, dust-covered and twisted, from the yellow, shifting sands the grasshoppers still chirped merrily, though it was sunset, and from the sun-blached sea-front came of a sudden the high, tuneful twanging of a mandoline, and a man's tenor voice singing that ancient love-song which one hears everywhere in the wine lands of the Guipuzcoa.

Pasé cantivo amor entus prisiones.

From the houses came forth the many mixed odours of the

evening *cena*, the appetising smell of rich *ollas*, mostly flavoured with garlic, be it said, while from the shops which sold eatables there emanated that faint and peculiar perfume which only those who have lived in hot climates can know, and can justly appreciate.

Of a sudden the ancient bells of Santa Gadea, the old incense-laden, Gothic church above the town, clanged forth again, as they had done so many times a day through centuries, summoning the good people of Fonterrabia to kneel before the high dark altar, with those long candles and the wonderful brass chandelier above.

Now as the bells jangled forth an observer might, perhaps, have noticed two men meet, as though entirely by accident, close to that obscure little café "The Concha," which faces the sea.

On the pavement before the little place sat several men in their blue *bérets*, drinking wine and gossiping as all Spaniards must do.

The pair who had met were of quite different stamp.

One, who was about forty, of a refined but rather parvenu type, was dressed in a well-cut suit of thin, dark grey material, and wore a straw hat much ripened by the sun. He was idly smoking a long *valenciano*, and betrayed surprise, though feigned, at the meeting. The other was a typical fisherman in the blue blouse and blue *béret*, the national headdress of all the Basque people. He still wore his heavy sea-boots, in which, however, he walked jauntily, for his age was not more than thirty, and his dark, handsome countenance was bright, enthusiastic,

and well bronzed.

On meeting, the man in the sun-ripened straw hat, and of much superior class, turned quickly and walked beside him.

As he did so a tall Jesuit priest, a man with a swarthy, sinister face and a long, rather shabby cassock – Father Gonzalo by name – chanced to pass.

Carlos Somoza, the fisherman, saluted him reverently, but beneath his breath he exclaimed in Spanish:

“May the Holy Madonna curse him for ever!”

“Why?” inquired the man in grey, whose name was Garcia Zorrilita, a native of Toledo, who had come in secret from Madrid in order to meet his fisherman friend.

“Because he may recognise you. There may be a hitch.”

“Bah! There will be no hitch. There cannot be. You people here in the country are so often faint-hearted. We in the capital are not. All goes well, and success must be ours. It is but a simple matter of waiting – waiting in patience.”

“Yes – but Father Gonzalo is a man whom I do not like.”

“Why? He looks really quite harmless. Who is he?”

“Nobody exactly knows,” was the fisherman’s reply, as they turned up the narrow Calle Mayor, that old-world street of high, handsome houses, mostly adorned with the crumbling coats-of-arms of the ancient proprietors, and with balconies of wrought iron, and wide, projecting roofs across the narrow footway. “He has been here for about four months, yet he is not attached to Santa Gadea. Sometimes he visits the sick, and all speak well of

him. But both Cardona and Cienfuegos agree with my suspicions that he is a Government agent, and that he is here to find out all he can.”

His companion grunted.

“*Dios!* If that is really so, then we must discover more about him,” he said. “I trust, however, you are wrong, for, as you say, he might recognise me again. And that would certainly be most awkward in my position – as Deputy-Governor of the Province of Navarre.”

“Yes, Excellency, that is why I cursed him,” replied the intelligent fisherman, with a smile. “At our meeting last Thursday, we discussed whether Father Gonzalo should not meet with – well, meet with an accident.”

“No, no!” replied the other quickly, raising his voice because at the moment a heavy cart, with its great wood disc wheels, drawn by two white bulls and laden with wine barrels, rumbled past them slowly over the cobbles. “Not here – that would never do, never! It would upset all our plans! We must be cautious – *always cautious*. Watch him, and report to me in the usual way – a letter to the Poste Restante in Madrid. I will at once inquire all about this mysterious Father, and the reason he has come to Fonterrabia. He may, as you suspect, be an agent of the Ministry in disguise.”

“We are quite certain that he is.”

“If so, he must not remain here,” declared the stranger decisively. “It would certainly be extremely dangerous for you,

and for all your friends. The success of our *coup* depends upon entire secrecy. Your little circle here have ever been loyal and undaunted. There must be no betrayal, as there was, you recollect, in Barcelona before the war.”

“Barcelona is a city, Fonterrabia is only a little town, and hence it should escape suspicion,” was the educated young fisherman’s remark. “Ours we know to be a just and honest cause, and we all, as sons of Spain, are each of us prepared willingly to sacrifice our lives if necessary.”

“Well said, Carlos! Our gallant leader, Ferdinand Contraras, who has lately sacrificed most of his great fortune to secure the salvation of Spain, is aware of your loyalty,” Zorrilta assured him. “A little time ago I was with him at one of our secret sessions at Toledo, and he mentioned you, and your friends here – and praised you for your patriotism as a true son of Spain.”

“But the Englishman! What of him?” asked Carlos, as, strolling slowly, they were approaching the great old church.

“That Englishman? Oh, yes, I know. You have serious and perhaps foolish apprehensions in that direction,” was the reply of the Deputy-Governor of Navarre. “But, Carlos, you can rest assured that we shall have no real trouble from that quarter. He will die – as the others have done. And he will die very soon!”

“*You are quite certain of that?*” asked the fisherman eagerly.

“Quite. It is all arranged – an accident – a mystery – and nothing more,” laughed the man from Madrid.

“The Englishman is our most serious enemy,” declared

Carlos, as yet only half convinced.

“One by one the enemies of our own Spanish people have been swept away. He will very soon follow them – rest assured. *De los enemigos los menos*– the fewer enemies the better.”

“But he may go back to England. We discussed it all here at our secret meeting last Thursday.”

“Well, and suppose he is in England, it does not matter. The avenging hand of our great Contraras – who may *Dios* protect – will strike him there, never fear. Wherever he is, he cannot escape us. He will die, and his death will be a mystery to the English police – as so many deaths have been.”

At that moment the pair found themselves passing the great old Gothic door of Santa Gadea, which the sacristan had thrown open to the air for an hour to clear the atmosphere of incense before closing for the night. In the deep, cavernous silence the eternal red lamp showed before the figure of the Virgin crowned, while far beyond were the long candles burning before the altar, with its many steps.

The sight of those candles impelled the pious and enthusiastic Carlos to suggest that they should enter the church, and there pray for the success of their plans.

The Deputy-Governor of Navarre in the shabby straw hat smiled, and at once agreed.

In all Latin countries the lower class have a habit of kneeling before their favourite altar and craving blessings of the most paltry character. In Italy, the *contadini* ask that the winning

numbers of the *lotto* or Government lottery may be revealed to them, or beg that their attempt at theft may be successful. In Spain they implore divine grace for a big catch of fish, or a fat harvest, so that they may enrich themselves.

Cupidity is, alas, the mainspring of most of the prayers of Southern Europe.

Garcia Zorrilta, political adventurer and wire-puller, who by reason of his cunning and unscrupulousness had risen from clerk in a flour-mill in Toledo to be Deputy-Governor of the Province of Navarre, knew how pious was his friend the young fisherman, and, mock piety being part of his profession, he was compelled to enter that great dark, over-ornamented church, and there kneel with his companion before the altar.

What Zorrilta, one of the lieutenants of the great Contraras, prayed for one does not know, but the prayer of Carlos the fisherman was for the speedy death of the one man he most greatly feared, the man to whom he had referred as “the Englishman.”

But as he rose from his knees, he whispered under his breath: “*Cuando no puede uno vestirse la piel del leon, vestase de la vulpeja*— when you cannot clothe yourself in the lion’s skin, put on that of the fox.”

Chapter One

The evening shadows were falling softly as the Earl of Saxham stepped into one of the small drawing-rooms of that palatial residence, Ticehurst Park, in the county of Sussex.

Ticehurst Park was a magnificent domain, deeply mortgaged. Out of its fair revenues, there were two or three heavily-pensioned dowagers who had to be provided for, there were a heap of relations who had to draw their small annual stipends.

On paper, the Earl of Saxham was a very wealthy nobleman. When he had deducted the interest on mortgages, and the yearly stipends and marriage settlements, he was quite poor. Out of every sovereign he received, he retained about ten shillings.

A less even-tempered man would have cursed his bad luck, that he should have been saddled with three dowagers, and a host of other cormorants.

Archibald, tenth Earl of Saxham, was a delightful optimist. He had come into the title by a series of fortunate accidents, and he was disposed to think that, on the whole, Providence had arranged things very agreeably. Before he took up the mantle of his fathers he had been trying to make both ends meet on a small private fortune of seven hundred a year, with but indifferent success. He had now, those irksome deductions apart, several thousands a year – in fact, a still very considerable income.

He fitted into the position as easily as a glove. His wife,

a woman of noble birth like himself, assisted him ably. They speedily became the most popular couple in Sussex, a county which boasts of many noble families.

He came into his inheritance at the age of thirty. Ten years after his beautiful and beloved wife died, leaving him with three children, Eric Viscount Ticehurst, Guy Rossett, and Mary Rossett. He was so devoted to the memory of his wife that he did not marry again.

Mary Rossett, the youngest of the three, was sitting in the small drawing-room when he entered this particular evening.

She was a handsome young woman of about twenty-five years, tall and slender. Her demeanour was a little staid, suggesting a woman some five years her senior.

Truth to tell, Mary Rossett had experienced a bitter romance when she was at the age of twenty. Her heart was buried in the grave of a young officer of the Guards, who had died suddenly a few days before the date of their wedding.

From that fatal day, she had said good-bye to love, in a measure to youth. No other man would ever charm back the lovelight into the eyes of Mary Rossett.

But fate, which had stricken her so sorely, did not deprive her of her sweet and womanly qualities. She was the beloved companion of her brothers, the idol of her widowed father; and she was adored by all the villagers on the estate, to many of whom she was often a ministering angel.

The Earl of Saxham, as he entered the small drawing-room,

was smiling in a peculiar manner. His daughter recognised that peculiar smile. Her father was very pleased with himself over something. But she knew what that something was.

“So Guy has come,” he cried cheerfully. “Well, Mary, don’t you give it away when he tells us the good news, or it will spoil it all.”

Lady Mary rose, and laid an affectionate hand on his arm.

“No need to caution me, dearest. You know I never give myself away. Keep a guard on yourself. Don’t smile too much, or look at me too meaningly when he is telling us, or he’ll spot it. You know, you are a little indiscreet at times.”

The Earl smiled genially.

“I know, I know, Mary. There is no fool like an old fool, they say. But this is really a great thing. I wrung it out of old Greatorax. And, once in Spain, we shall get him out of the reach of that young minx, Isobel Clandon.”

Mary’s brows contracted into a slight frown: Love had left her stranded, but she was still very sympathetic to young lovers.

“Why are you so hard on poor Isobel, father?” she asked in her clear, kind voice. “I know she is poor, but she is a lady and well-born.”

Her voice faltered a little, as she added, “Hugh was poor, when you gave your consent that I should marry him. Why do you make this distinction with Guy?”

The Earl looked a little embarrassed.

“My dear Mary, you are a sensible girl, and you must see that

the circumstances are totally dissimilar. Hugh was the younger son of a house as noble as our own. True he was poor, but I could have helped you.”

“And if you were ready to help me, you can help Guy and Isobel,” flashed Lady Mary quickly.

The Earl spoke a little irritably.

“It is very strange you can’t see it. Isobel Clandon is, I admit, quite a lady in the technical sense of the term. But Guy must look beyond that. He must marry in his own rank. Failing that, he must marry a woman with money.”

Lady Mary spoke with an equal irritation.

“You are unjust, father, unjust both to Guy and Isobel. You have no right to ruin these two young lives with your prejudices and your old-world notions.” Her voice dropped into a half-sob as she concluded. “What is there in the world better than real love? And these two love each other devotedly.”

The Earl was about to reply angrily, for he was a somewhat obstinate old man, and hated being thwarted. But, before he could utter a word, the door opened to admit Guy Rossett.

Guy was a very handsome young fellow, with a winning and genial expression. He advanced and shook his father’s hand warmly, and kissed his sister with equal affection.

The Earl beamed upon him. Guy was his favourite of the two sons. Ticehurst was a languid young man about town, who did not appeal greatly to his more robust father.

“Well, Guy, my dear boy, delighted to see you. Have you

brought us any news?"

Mary shot a warning glance at her father. Lord Saxham was always preaching reticence to other people, but he never observed it himself. If Guy had been just a little more subtle than he was, he would have smelt a rat at once.

Guy spoke in his frank, almost boyish voice.

"Splendid news, sir, but so good that I want to keep it to myself for a little bit. Shall we say till after dinner, when the servants have gone, and we are quite by ourselves."

"By all means." It was Mary's sweet, gentle voice that answered. "I am sure I should like to keep very good news to myself for a time; hug it as it were. After dinner, Guy!"

Later on, they went into the dining-room. The meal was a somewhat tedious and long repast. Lord Saxham, who was a bit of a gourmet, liked to take a small portion of several dishes. Guy was a hearty trencherman.

Poor Lady Mary, whose thoughts inclined towards a convent, would have been satisfied with a cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter, but she had to preside over these prolonged meals.

When the ponderous banquet – no lesser word could describe it – had drawn to a close, the footman withdrew. It was a family party, the two men sat round the table and smoked. Lady Mary waited to hear the great news. And then Guy unburthened himself.

"The biggest stroke of luck in the world, sir. After fooling about in the Foreign Office for all these years, Greatorex sent for

me to go into his private room. A very short interview: Greatorex doesn't waste words. I am to go to the Embassy at Madrid."

Lady Mary preserved her sweet calm. The Earl did not move an eyelid. He lifted his glass of port.

"Success to you, my boy. You have got a chance now. And I am sure you will make good."

The young man drained his glass also.

"Yes, I think I shall make good. What I just wanted was a chance."

Mary shot a warning glance at her father. It was just on the cards that he might have blurted out something that would have hurt his son's pride, led him to understand that it was his father's secret influence that had got him this post.

But, fortunately, at this stage the Earl's mental faculties were not very acute. He was already beginning to nod over his port.

A few moments later, Lord Saxham's somnolent faculties became more fully developed. Mary pointed to the terrace which was approached by the dining-room windows. She leaned across the table and whispered.

"Shall we take a stroll? I would like to talk all this over with you."

Guy nodded and rose. They went noiselessly to the terrace, and sat down on one of the numerous seats, overlooking the lovely gardens beneath.

Mary opened the conversation at once.

"Is this – this good news – going to make any difference to

you, Guy?"

There was just a note of anxiety in her voice.

Guy looked at her squarely.

"What do you mean, Mary? Difference in what way?"

"Difference between you and Isobel?" answered Mary, in a voice that shook a little. "You love each other so dearly. I would hate to think that anything could come between you."

Guy laughed his hearty, boyish laugh.

"Dear old girl, you know I have always told the truth to you. I would sooner go to the devil with Isobel Clandon, than to heaven with some delightful bride that our dear old dad had chosen for me. As soon as I am on my feet, Isobel will be my wife."

Mary patted his hand affectionately.

"I am so delighted to hear you say that. But one never quite knows men. There is father, in a way sentimental, but on certain things he can be as hard as granite."

Guy Rossett frowned.

"Oh, I know. He hates the idea of my marrying Isobel. I suppose when I do he will forbid me the house, and cut me off with a shilling, eh?"

Mary looked at him, with a soft gleam in her kind, beautiful eyes.

"Oh, no, he will not do that. And if he wanted to, I should not let him. You know, I have more influence over him than anybody."

"Except, perhaps, Ticehurst?" suggested Guy, in a tone that

was not quite free from bitterness. He was not over-fond of his elder brother.

Mary shook her head.

She was fond of both her brothers, but she was not oblivious of Ticehurst's faults.

"Don't worry about that, dear old boy. Eric has no influence over him at all. And when the dreadful deed is done, and Isobel is your wife, dear old dad will rage and fume, and all that. But he will come round in the end, and finish by loving Isobel as much as he does me. Don't worry. Go on with it."

Guy kissed her.

"By Jove, you are a pal, Mary. Then I can count on you to back me up."

"Of course," was Mary's confident reply.

There was silence between them for a little while, while Guy puffed at his cigarette, and his sister was cogitating as to her next method of attack. Brought up in a household of three men, she knew it was somewhat difficult to storm the masculine citadel.

Presently she spoke.

"And what about finance, Guy? Are things easy there?"

The boyish look disappeared from the young man's face. Her question had seemed to disturb his equanimity. He was quite frank.

"That's the devil of it, Mary. You know my old friend Jackson?"

Mary gave a little sigh. Yes, she had heard of Jackson

from both brothers. He was a high-class moneylender, who accommodated young men of good family.

“Yes, I know all about Jackson. How much do you owe him?”

Her brother reflected.

“Something between five and six hundred,” he said, after a pause.

Mary spoke decidedly.

“You must clear that off before you go to Spain – you must have a clean sheet.”

She reflected also, before she spoke again.

“I can let you have two hundred and fifty out of what I have saved.”

Guy interrupted.

“You sweet little soul, you never spend anything except in charities.”

“I know,” answered his sister quietly. “Anyway, there is my two hundred and fifty, and I must coax the rest out of dad. You must go to Spain with a clean sheet. That is absolutely essential.”

Guy answered with his boyish laugh and with his boyish exuberance.

“It is too awfully dear and kind of you, and you can guess how I appreciate it. But I am not going to let my sister waste her money on two graceless scamps like Ticehurst and myself. And I don’t sponge on my father, either.”

Mary protested gently.

“Oh, Guy, how unjust of both yourself and Eric. You know

that is not my opinion of either of you.” Guy took her slender hand in his own.

“You dear old girl, you are only just a little bit lower than the angels; you have always had wings growing since you were a wee toddler. But I am going to see this thing through on my own. Jackson is an old scoundrel of course, but he never presses one very hard. I shall square him all right.”

Mary said no more on the subject. Both her brothers inherited the paternal obstinacy. When they had once made up their minds, nothing could move them.

But she sighed a little. It would have been so much better if Guy could have got rid of this odious moneylender, and have landed in Spain with a clean sheet. He would have been free from any pecuniary worries, and, therefore, in a better mood to attend to his work.

Jackson was done with, but there was another subject which she wanted to broach before this interview was ended. And it was a rather delicate one. It was some little time before she spoke again.

“And how about that woman, Violet Hargrave? Are you quite clear of her? It is not fair to Isobel that you should keep up even a semblance of friendship with such an odious person.”

Guy laughed, but this time his laugh did not ring clear and boyish; it betrayed uneasiness.

“Oh, come, Mary, you are a bit uncharitable, aren’t you. Violet Hargrave is generally considered a charming, not an odious,

person.”

His sister spoke a little sternly for her.

“I don’t pretend to have a man’s knowledge of the world, but I have not been brought up in a nursery. I know her type, and it is one from which any pure woman, and any decent man, ought to shrink. Have you given her up?”

Guy looked her squarely in the face.

“Honestly, Mary, I have, just after I met Isobel. Of course, a man can’t throw a woman over in a second, but I have cooled down gradually. At the present moment, I think the fascinating widow hates me.”

Mary rose and spoke decidedly.

“I am glad to have your assurance of that. If it had not been so, I might have felt it my duty to warn Isobel. She is too sterling a girl to be played with.”

Her brother rose too, half resentful, half admiring. It was not the first time that Lady Mary had spoken salutary words of wisdom to him.

“By Jove, Mary, you are uncompromising. Do you mean to say you would give me away to Isobel – me, your own brother?”

“Of course,” answered Mary firmly. “To Isobel, or any other woman, if I thought you were unworthy of her.”

Admiration conquered. He tucked her arm in his, as they returned to the house.

“You dear old girl, you are one out of a million. But you know you are a little uncomfortable at times, and when you are inclined

that way, you have a knack of making a fellow feel a bit of a worm.”

Mary laughed pleasantly.

“So good for you feeling that, dear old boy, and equally good for Eric. I expect dad has woken up by now, and wondering where we have got to.” They found the Earl wide-awake. The doze of a few minutes over his port had refreshed him immensely. He fell at once to discussing Spain, a country he knew well.

In his youth, Lord Saxham had been an attaché at the Spanish Court, and he knew the ropes. Guy listened respectfully to his father.

The old man concluded his somewhat rambling remarks with a final exhortation.

“And remember, my dear boy, always to keep on the right side of Greatorex. He *is* the Foreign Office. Secretaries, mere figure-heads, come and go with different Governments. Greatorex remains there, permanent, unchangeable. Get into his good graces, and your fortune is made.”

Guy promised that he would do his best to propitiate the all-powerful Greatorex. Two days later he left. He undertook to pay them a farewell visit before he started for Spain.

The Earl and his daughter watched the car flying down the avenue. The old man turned to his daughter with a grunt.

“Might have given us another couple of days, I think. But I know what’s in his mind. He is running down to Eastbourne after that minx.”

He always alluded to Isobel Clandon as “that minx,” owing to his unreasonable prejudice against her.

Mary spoke with spirit.

“Very natural under the circumstances, I should think. He would want to see something of the girl he loves before he left.”

Lord Saxham turned on her angrily.

“Mary, I have always thought you a sensible woman. Do you mean to tell me you are going to aid and abet him in his folly?”

Lady Mary answered him in a few words.

“I don’t call it folly, father.”

She walked out of the room, with a resolute expression on her face, and uplifted chin. She would have been the last to admit it, but she had inherited no small share of the family obstinacy.

Chapter Two

Mrs Hargrave sat in her pretty flat in Mount Street, absorbed in deep thought. On her lap lay an open letter, and it was a passage in that letter just received which accounted for her preoccupation.

She was a pretty woman, *petite* and slender, with clear-cut, refined features and delicate colouring. She had soft, candid blue eyes, and a wealth of fair hair which was always arranged in the most becoming fashion.

In a strong and searching light, a keen judge would have guessed her real age, just a little over the wrong side of thirty. But she was quite a clever person, and she always avoided strong lights as much as possible. Under favourable conditions, most people took her to be at least four or five years younger. She owned herself to twenty-six.

There was no getting at the truth of the matter. Since she first came to London, four years ago, having been married abroad to her husband, Jack Hargrave, a young man of good family, but a bit of a *mauvais sujet*, she had made many acquaintances. But she appeared to have no old friends who could throw any light on her real age or her antecedents.

Her husband's relatives received her with scant cordiality, there was too much reticence about her previous history to incline them in her favour. As a matter of fact, they were not

over-fond of Jack himself. There had been certain early episodes in his career which had not endeared him to right-thinking persons.

It was well-known that he was in no sense of the word a wealthy man. Yet he kept an expensive flat, he was always immaculately dressed, and his wife, to judge by her costly costumes, must have had a very liberal allowance.

They entertained a great deal, and they had bridge parties every night when they were at home. Knowing people whispered amongst themselves that it was their winnings at bridge which enabled them to make such a brave show. They were certainly both very skilful players. Not a few persons thought they were a bit too skilful, too uniformly successful.

Two years after their marriage, Jack Hargrave died suddenly of pneumonia, the result of a neglected chill. Strange to say, he left no will. His widow explained this by the fact that he had made all his property over to her, by deed of gift, soon after their marriage, as he did not want her to be burdened with death duties.

Things were not altered in any way by Jack's death. His widow kept on the expensive flat in Mount Street. When a decent period of mourning had elapsed, she appeared in her usual tasteful costumes, and resumed her bridge parties.

There was nothing to wonder at in this. If Jack Hargrave had made over all his property to her, she was as well-off after his death as before. Rather better, as there was only one to spend the income instead of two.

A certain thing, however, did occur which made some people suspicious. Her husband's relatives, who had never been more than coldly civil during Jack's lifetime, now dropped her altogether.

Jack, who was a few years younger than his wife, had been at Eton and Oxford with Guy Rossett, and they were old friends. When Hargrave returned from abroad with his pretty bride, he had hunted up Guy and induced him to become a frequent visitor in Mount Street.

Guy was considerably attracted by the young hostess. Of course, he knew that his friend was looked at askance by many people, and he knew nothing more than the rest about Mrs Hargrave's antecedents.

When the fair young widow resumed her normal existence, and her bridge parties, young Rossett again became a frequent visitor. And now that there was no obstacle in the shape of a husband, he allowed her to see that her attraction for him had grown very considerably.

She met him more than half-way. There was no doubt that the attraction was mutual. But there were other reasons that weighed strongly with her. Guy had a small allowance from his father, but it was supplemented by a very handsome one from his great-aunt, an old lady of eighty, who would also leave him her very considerable private fortune.

In every sense, he was a most eligible person. He was handsome, distinguished-looking and charming, with the perfect

manners of the young diplomatist. And one day, and it could not be a very long one now, he would be a rich man by the death of Lady Henrietta.

For many months, Guy Rossett went to the flat in Mount Street, losing a considerable sum of money at bridge to his hostess and various members of her circle.

There was a certain strain of caution in him, a certain recognition of the fact that he would require to know a good deal more than he did about the charming widow's past, before he committed himself definitely, that kept the sense of attraction on his side within reasonable bounds.

Still, there is no knowing what might have happened, but for the occurrence of a certain event. Mrs Hargrave was very charming, very subtle, equipped with all the wiles of a clever and experienced woman. One day, his self-control might have given way, her fascination might have overpowered his prudence, and he would have committed himself beyond recall.

Then something happened which switched away his thoughts for ever from the flat in Mount Street and its fascinating owner. At a certain country house he met Isobel Clandon, the daughter of a retired general, a widower who lived at Eastbourne.

He took her in to dinner the first night of his arrival, and he knew he had found the woman of his dreams. Isobel was a lovely girl of twenty-two, a little above the middle height, a vision of beauty and grace.

Her fresh and virginal charm, her spontaneous gaiety, drove

out all recollection of the more artificial attractions of the older woman. The one suggested the brightness and freshness of spring, the other fading tints of summer.

It was love at first sight on both sides, and Guy knew that he had never really loved before. And Isobel had not even flirted with a man before she saw him. She came to him whole-hearted, and he came as little scarred as a man might be who has lived twenty-seven years in the world, and seen and known many women.

Mrs Hargrave roused herself from her reverie, and took up the letter for the second time. It was from an intimate acquaintance, and the envelope bore the Eastbourne post-mark. Again she read that particular paragraph which had so perturbed her.

“I have at last succeeded in meeting your Miss Clandon at a garden-party. I made myself as pleasant as I could, and you know I can make myself pretty well liked when I try. I think she has taken a fancy to me, and that we shall be great friends presently. I am going to tea with her to-morrow, and will let you know if I can get anything definite out of her.

“She is twenty-two, and certainly a lovely girl, also a very charming one. I introduced Mr Rossett’s name, of course, and she just looked a little shy. But I could not get her to say much, only this, that he is coming down to Eastbourne directly, and that he has just secured an important appointment abroad, at the British Embassy in Spain.

“She wears no engagement ring, so they are not publicly

betrothed. But I am sure there is a very good understanding between them.”

The widow threw the letter down on her lap, with a fierce exclamation.

“Twenty-two, and a lovely girl,” she muttered angrily. “Some pink and white beauty, I suppose, immature, knowing nothing of life. And these are the women who catch men of the world with their youth and innocence.”

Her face grew hard, she looked almost plain, and for the moment her thirty years showed themselves unmistakably.

She tore the offending note into fragments, and threw them into a dainty little waste-paper basket – everything about the flat was dainty.

“But I will get even with Mr Guy Rossett before long,” she cried vindictively, as she returned to her seat.

It was somewhere about ten o’clock in the morning when she indulged in these bitter reflections, when she had to admit, in the face of that letter, that her ambitious schemes had gone astray.

At the same hour, a tall and corpulent gentleman, attired in an elegant morning coat and silk hat, descended the steps of his house at Walton, stepped into the Rolls-Royce car waiting for him, drove to the station, and took the train to London.

He was known in his business, and in the neighbourhood, as Mr Jackson, although his foreign appearance and swarthy complexion gave the direct lie to his English name.

Not for him the easy bowler or soft hat, and the lounge suit.

He had an idea that to be successful in business it was necessary to preserve the old traditions. Financial stability was suggested by the frock coat and the topper.

He described himself as a financier, and so in a certain sense he was. But in spite of the name of Jackson, he was a Spaniard by birth, and his real cognomen was Juan Jaques. As regards his business, he was a moneylender, pure and simple.

He had a spacious suite of offices in one of the most private-looking houses in Dover Street. His staff was small, consisting of a confidential woman secretary who typed his letters, generally suave, but occasionally menacing; an equally confidential clerk who kept his accounts; and a smart office boy.

From this agreeable point of vantage, he accommodated young men of good family, and equally good prospects, when they were temporarily hard up. He had a very select *clientèle*, and, to do him justice, for a moneylender, he was not extortionate. "Treat your clients fairly, and they will come again. You make regular customers of them. They don't go buzzing off to Tom, Dick, and Harry." These were the principles on which he conducted his very lucrative business.

He was in a very good humour this morning, as he got out of the taxi which had brought him from Waterloo to his office.

There were very few letters, but their contents pleased him; they suggested good business. The last one was from Guy Rossett, who intimated that he would call about twelve o'clock, as he wanted to have a short chat.

The astute Spaniard, known to all but a very few as the naturalised Englishman, Jackson, smiled.

He had not enjoyed the pleasure of Guy's acquaintance very long. Mrs Hargrave had brought the two men together, and the introduction had been effected through the following circumstances.

At a certain period, Guy had found himself very short of money, practically due to bridge losses at the flat in Mount Street. He had rather hesitatingly asked the charming widow if she knew of any decent moneylender, who would finance him at a rate of interest that was not too extortionate.

Violet had raised her candid blue eyes – they were her best asset – to his, with a world of pity in them.

“Oh, Mr Rossett, I am so sorry to hear of this. It is all this horrible bridge. I always seem lucky, but such a lot of my friends have bad luck. I think I shall give up these parties, if they are going to embarrass the people I like.”

There was a soft mist in her eyes, as she gave utterance to these noble sentiments. Guy felt a little thrill pass through him. She was not a mere worldling, she had her full share of real kindness, of real womanliness.

“One's own fault, you know,” he answered lightly. “I suppose I ought to be old enough to take care of myself. I needn't play bridge if I don't want to, need I?”

Mrs Hargrave did not answer for a moment. She seemed struggling with her remorseful thoughts. Then, after a brief

space, inspiration came to her, and she played a strong and winning card.

She laid her hand upon his arm, and her voice trembled ever so little as she spoke.

“Mr Rossett, we have been very good friends, have we not? And you were a pal of dear old Jack’s long before I met him.”

Rossett nodded. At the moment he had no idea what she was driving at, or what she was leading up to. And he was pretty quick too.

“Then I want you, for the moment, to think of me as a pal. Fancy for the time I am Jack, your old friend. What I want to say is this, don’t go to these horrible people. They are sure to rook you. I have a little money put by – dear old Jack left me comfortably off – and I make quite a small income out of my winnings. Let me be your banker. Now, don’t be proud.”

Guy was profoundly touched, and he thanked her in no measured terms. But the idea of borrowing money from a woman, even if she were a dear friend, was too horrible to contemplate for a second. Had there been no alternative, he would sooner have blown his brains out.

He told her this, and she sighed regretfully, as one amazed at the obstinacy of a certain type of man. She knew, could she once have got him to accept this loan, she would be sure of him.

“You see, it is quite impossible,” he ended, rather awkwardly. It is not a pleasant thing to refuse the kindness thrust upon you in the most graceful way by a charming woman. “Do you happen

to know of any of these sharks?"

Frustrated in her clever little scheme, the fair Violet reflected for a few seconds. Then she spoke in a hesitating voice, as if she were trying to recall certain memories of the past.

"Yes, I do know a man who, I believe, is a decent specimen of his kind. You know, a lot of people wonder that Jack was so well-off. Well, in the first place, he was awfully clever, and he had two or three good friends in the City who gave him tips. But he wanted a bit of capital. He found out this man Jackson, who has offices in Dover Street. Jackson believed in him, and financed him, of course taking a good share. That was only natural."

Rossett pricked up his ears. The thing that had puzzled so many people was already partly explained. Jack had been, as his wife said, a clever fellow, and a bit of a dark horse. He had been making money in the City in a subterranean way, with the help of the philanthropic Mr Jackson, who, no doubt, had looked after his own share of the profits. But why the deuce had not Jack Hargrave told this openly to his intimates? Then all *innuendos* and suspicions would have been silenced at once.

Mrs Hargrave went on in her sweet, low voice. "I don't think I have ever told this to a soul. You will respect my confidence. I always thought it a little silly of Jack, but he made a point of keeping the secret to himself."

"Need you ask the question?" queried Guy Rossett reproachfully.

"No, I am sure I can trust you. Well, this man Jackson; by the

way, that is not his real name, he is a naturalised Spaniard. I see him sometimes on a few matters in which he is still interested, and which he looks after for me. I will give you a note to him, and ask him to treat you very gently.”

But, before she moved to her writing-table, she again looked pleadingly at him.

“Are you sure you will not reconsider my suggestion? Surely you would rather be indebted to me than to a mere sordid moneylender?”

Again Guy repeated his thanks. But on this point he was adamant; nothing would move him.

He took the letter of introduction to Mr Jackson. This gentleman was affability itself. Mrs Hargrave’s introduction was quite sufficient. Guy was too much a gentleman to put searching questions as to Jackson’s private knowledge of the Hargraves, husband and wife.

On his side, Mr Jackson had the private *dossier* of every eligible young man, from the moneylender’s point of view, entered in his reference book. He knew all about the Earl of Saxham, and the Lady Henrietta. Young Mr Rossett was quite a desirable client. He was pleased to add him to his list.

As a matter of fact, the loan was quite a small one, and was granted on reasonable terms. There was no speculative element in the transaction. Guy was a young man who might make a mistake now and again, but he would never kick over the traces for long, and he was as straight as a die.

On this particular morning, Mr Jackson received him with the greatest affability.

“Delighted to see you, Mr Rossett. Too early for a drink, I am afraid, but have a cigar.”

He pushed across a box of cigars that even a Spanish Jew could not have bought under half a crown apiece.

“Now, what is it, Mr Rossett? Just a little more ready, I suppose?”

Guy bit off the end of the very excellent cigar with a composed air. He had not the appearance of a suppliant for financial favours.

“Not quite as bad as that, Mr Jackson. But I have a bill for six hundred due next month. It would be a great convenience to me if you would renew half when it falls due, of course on the usual terms.”

For a moment, Mr Jackson’s face fell. He had hoped he was going to get deeper into the young man’s ribs, looking forward to that blessed day when Lady Henrietta’s fortune would wipe off all arrears.

Then, the next moment, he cheered up. Guy was not going to be a very big customer, but he was a safe one. A young man who could pay off half of his indebtedness was to be trusted. Not much waiting, just quick profits.

It took them a few moments to discuss the details of the extension of the loan. When these had been settled, Mr Jackson consulted his watch.

“I think, Mr Rossett, we might venture upon a small bottle now, what do you think?”

Guy really did not want anything to drink at this comparatively early hour of the morning. But, in view of further favours, it would not be politic to check his host’s hospitable impulses.

The moneylender produced a very excellent small bottle of *veuve cliquot*. The two men sat chatting for some time. Suddenly, the telephone bell rang.

What was whispered down it seemed to agitate Mr Jackson a little. Rossett could, of course, only catch his disjointed replies.

“Actually left the house, you say, on the way. Ought always to give me notice. Might be too busy. Well, it can’t be helped. Good-bye.”

As a matter of fact, it was Mrs Hargrave’s maid who had rung up to tell him that her mistress was on her way to his office. He knew enough to be sure that a meeting between Violet and Rossett would be very disturbing to both, hence his discomfiture.

Mount Street to Dover Street in a taxi is not a very far cry. If Guy Rossett did not swallow his champagne and clear out in a few seconds, the meeting was inevitable. The only apartments were the outer office, the waiting-room, and his own sanctum, and they all led into each other.

Guy, not being thirsty, drank his wine very leisurely. Then he rose to go, but some minutes had elapsed, and at the moment he rose the office boy brought in a slip of folded paper, on which was written Mrs Hargrave’s name.

“Many thanks for meeting me in this little matter, Mr Jackson. Well, for the present, good-bye.” And poor Guy Rossett, fondly thinking that he had laid the ghosts of the past, emerged from Jackson’s room to be confronted with Violet Hargrave, seated in one of those luxurious easy chairs which the hospitable foreigner provided for his waiting clients.

He put the best face he could on the situation, and advanced with outstretched hand.

“An unexpected pleasure, Mrs Hargrave,” he cried in a very uncertain voice. A more embarrassed specimen of a budding diplomatist could not have been observed.

The pretty widow ignored the outstretched hand. She looked at him steadily, and the blue eyes were no longer soft and limpid, but hard as steel.

“I think,” she said in a voice that was as hard as her glance, “you are indulging in the language of diplomacy, which is usually used to disguise one’s real thoughts.”

Rossett turned red, and began, in his agitation, to stammer forth lame and foolish excuses.

“I have been awfully busy lately, you know, not had time for anything in the social line. The truth is, Mrs Hargrave, I have just woke up to the fact that I have been wasting a good part of my life. I am really going in now for work, hard work, and ambition.”

She swept him with a contemptuous glance.

“Is this supposed to be an apology for your despicable conduct as regards myself?”

“As you please to take it, Mrs Hargrave.” Knowing he was utterly in the wrong, he took refuge in a sort of sullen dignity.

Her voice grew more scornful as she answered in her clear, vibrant tones.

“I should not like to detain you even for a moment, when you have such a laudable object in view. If you are going to atone for those wasted years, you will have a tremendous lot of leeway to make up. You cannot spare a second. Good day.” He could not rally under her sharp tongue and keen woman’s wit. He bowed, and was about to move away when she stopped him with an imperious gesture.

“One moment of your valuable time, if you please, Mr Rossett. You are fond of running away when the situation becomes a little inconvenient to yourself. But on this, I hope, our last meeting, I wish to say a few words to you, which it is well you should hear. May I presume to trespass on your time for a few seconds longer?”

There was still in her tones the same bitter note of sarcasm. But by this time, Guy had recovered himself a little, and was able to muster a remnant of dignity.

“My time is at your disposal,” he replied quietly.

“You have not acted the part of a gentleman, Mr Rossett. You were supposed to be my husband’s friend; you pretended to be mine. Certain events occurred, the nature of which it is easy to guess, which caused you to think my friendship was no longer desirable. That is the truth, is it not? Be frank for once, if a

diplomatist can ever be frank.”

She dominated the situation. Rossett could only stammer forth a shamefaced admission that it was the truth.

“You admit it. Would you not have played a more manly part, if you had come to me with a frank and proper explanation of those events?”

“That is just what I ought to have done,” said Guy Rossett humbly. He had never admired her more than now. Up to the present moment he had no idea that this dainty, slender woman, more or less of a butterfly, had such spirit in her fragile frame.

“Instead of that,” pursued Violet Hargrave in her inflexible, vibrating tones, “you adopt a device pursued by many men I know, by the type of man who lacks moral courage. I am afraid I shall hurt you a little now, but I don’t mind because you have hurt me, and I want to cry quits. You adopted the coward’s device of running away from the woman to whom you were afraid to tell the truth.”

Rossett was utterly beaten. He could not say a word in self-defence. He stood speechless under the lash of her scorn, her not unjustifiable indignation. She dismissed him with a wave of her hand.

“I will keep you no longer, Mr Rossett. For some years we were rather intimate friends. To-day we are strangers. As a stranger, I will bid you good-bye.”

And Guy Rossett was happy to escape. He had never felt more humiliated in his life.

He put himself into a taxi, and drove straight to the St. James's Club, beloved of diplomatists. He ruminated ruefully over his discomfiture at the hands of the sharp-tongued Mrs Hargrave.

“Some women have the knack of making a man feel like a worm,” he thought bitterly. “Mary has it in her quiet, incisive way. Violet has it to perfection.”

The young widow entered the sanctum of the moneylender. Outwardly, her demeanour was calm, but in her breast a volcano was raging. Her pride had been humbled, her hopes ruthlessly crushed. She was raging with all the resentful impotence of the woman scorned.

Jackson met her with outstretched hands, and took both of hers.

“My poor little Violet,” he said kindly. “I can see you are very upset; at least, it is plain to me who have known you from a baby. If you had only told your maid to 'phone me up before you started, I would have delayed you, and prevented this.”

She sank down on a chair with a little weary sigh. “You have always been my best friend, Juan. Heaven knows what I should have done or where I should have been without you.”

“Tut, tut.” The “financier” was very human where women were concerned. “And you are fond of this fellow, eh, apart from other considerations?”

“I was, Juan, but now I hate him,” was the uncompromising reply. “Still, on the whole, I am not sure I would have missed that little talk with him. Clever young man of the world as he is,

ready and quick as he was, I cut him to the quick. I made him feel very small.”

Jackson chuckled. “I will wager you gave him a good dressing down, when you once started. Well now, my child, I guess you want to see me on something important.”

“Something very important,” was the reply.

The two drew their chairs closely together, and conversed in low tones, using the Spanish language.

Chapter Three

To a man of Lord Saxham's ancient lineage and broad acres, although those same broad acres were somewhat heavily encumbered, General Clandon was a mere nobody. He was just one of the many thousands of persons who are entitled to be called gentlemen, as a matter of courtesy, but have no claim to rank in the same category with pure aristocracy.

All the same, the General came of very respectable stock, from that section of the small landowning class which is the backbone of the territorial interest. His forbears had been settled in Kent for some six generations. His eldest brother, Hugh Clandon, who had ruled over Clandon Place, had a rent roll of some five thousand a year clear.

To an ordinary person, in a lower walk of life, this would seem by no means a despicable income. But Clandon Place was a large house, and cost a good deal to keep up, even on an economical scale. And all the Clandons, with the solitary exception of the General himself, were exceedingly prolific.

His brother Hugh had eight children. He was one of ten. Daughters had to be portioned off, sons had to be educated and started in the world. Geoffrey Clandon inherited a few thousands on his father's death; he always thought his father must have been a wonderful man to leave so much, considering the calls upon him. The General contrived to live upon the modest income

derived from this small capital, plus his half-pay.

He now lived at Eastbourne upon the somewhat slender revenue. When he died, his only child, Isobel, would have a few hundred pounds a year to call her own.

In his youth, he had been exceedingly handsome, and, had he been of a more worldly turn of mind, he might easily have married money. Instead, he married for love, and never repented it. His wife brought him no fortune, but she brought him other things beyond price.

Mrs Clandon died when Isobel was sixteen, and all the intense love which the General had borne his wife was transferred to his daughter, who fully reciprocated her father's devotion.

She was a very sweet and lovable girl, perhaps just a little wiser and older than her actual years, as is often the case with only children, who have been brought up in close companionship with their parents.

She looked after his house admirably, saw that his meals were well cooked and daintily served. As for herself, thanks to an admirable figure, and a knack of knowing how to wear her clothes, she always looked smartly turned out on a most slender allowance.

They lived on the outskirts of Eastbourne, in an unpretentious house, a cottage which had been turned into a half villa. All the added rooms were spacious, with the original low ceilings, which gave a picturesque effect.

There was over an acre of garden, and half of that was devoted

to the cultivation of flowers. Isobel adored flowers, and loved to see bowls of them in the different rooms. She was no mean gardener herself, and often worked hard in conjunction with the rather ancient person who attended to the small domain.

County society did not have anything to say to General Clandon and his daughter, they were too small fry, but in the selecter circles of strictly Eastbourne residents they were considerable figures.

The General had preferred not to settle down in his native place, near his brother. His means were too small to allow him to compete on equal terms with the local magnates who were his contemporaries. He was a very proud man, and he was still more sensitive on Isobel's account.

From all she had heard of small county society, of which her uncle was a specimen, she did not think she had missed much. She was quite happy in her little circle at Eastbourne; it was more amusing, and not at all stiff or pretentious.

Once a year, since she was eighteen, she had a brief glimpse of a more fashionable world. The General had kept up a life-long intimacy with an old and wealthy friend, Sir William Glanville, who owned a large estate in Kent. Every autumn an invitation came for the shooting, and in that invitation Isobel was included.

Here she met people, men and women of quite a different calibre, spoiled children of the world, used to luxury from their cradle. Yet she was not sure that she enjoyed these visits very greatly. The profusion of wealth contrasted too sharply with their

own daily mode of life.

If her father by some miracle should come into a fortune, and she smiled at the absurd thought, no doubt she would bear herself as bravely as these other girls she met.

But that last visit, that delicious last visit, she had thoroughly enjoyed. Guy Rossett had taken her into dinner, and danced attendance on her for the best part of a delightful week. At last she had met a man who seemed to stand a head and shoulders above his fellows.

But for a little time much sadness was mingled with her joy.

On more than one night, when Guy's glance had thrilled her, when Guy's gentle pressure of the hand, as he bade her good night, had set her heart fluttering, she had cried herself to sleep.

She had heard all about him from her hostess, a kind-hearted, gossiping soul. He was the second son of a wealthy peer of ancient lineage. With his father's influence, he would be sure to obtain eminence in the diplomatic field. And he would inherit a big fortune from his grand-aunt, the Lady Henrietta.

Poor Isobel felt a very lonely maiden as she listened to this splendid recital. As a mere man, with his good looks and charm, he could choose where he liked. With these advantages in addition, he could pick from the noblest in the land.

Of course, she was a little fool, and the sooner she said good-bye to her vain dreams the better. Guy Rossett was attracted by her for the moment, no doubt. But it was impossible a man in his position, with his prospects, could mean anything serious. Could

a man, in whose veins ran the blood of a dozen earls, choose for his wife the descendant of paltry squires?

And then had come that wonderful day, a day in her life ever to be marked with a white stone, when Guy had overtaken her as she was indulging in a solitary ramble in the now leafless park.

In impassioned words he had told her how he loved her, how she was the one woman in the world he wanted for his wife. He loved her. Did she care for him? Dazed, and overjoyed with her happiness, her lovely dark eyes half suffused with tears, she faltered forth a trembling yes.

He took her in his arms, and gave her her first lover's kiss.

Then, when her brain had ceased to whirl, when she could recover from the great shock of her newly-found joy, she began to think.

"But it is all a dream," she murmured. "It is impossible."

"Impossible!" repeated Guy. "Why do you use the word?"

"But, of course, you can see. You are the son of an aristocrat, big even amongst aristocrats. I am a nobody. Lady Glanville tells me you are going to be an ambassador, or something dreadfully big and awe-inspiring."

Guy laughed genially. "Oh, you sweet little soul. Has that dear old woman been filling you with all that sort of stuff? Haven't brains enough, my darling. And, if it should turn out true, and I do become an ambassador, you will grow up with me, and you'll find the part of ambassador's wife fit you like a glove."

But, presently, after the first rhapsodies had passed, they

began to talk soberly.

Guy had to state that his father, splendid old fellow as he was, none better, was very prejudiced and, as his son put it with more than filial frankness, "as obstinate as a mule."

Isobel nodded her pretty dark head. "I understand quite. He will want you to marry in your own station of life, choose a girl who has been brought up in the same world."

Guy nodded. "You've hit it. A sort of girl who would know, by inherited instinct, all the sort of tricks that are expected from an ambassador's wife. You see, I take it for granted I am going to be an ambassador."

Isobel looked at him fondly. In her present rapturous mood, she thought he could be anything he liked, if he gave his mind to it.

Then Guy spoke quite gravely and seriously.

"Now, we have got to consider the two fathers, yours and mine. We will take yours first, because I think he'll do whatever you tell him."

"He generally does," replied Isobel, with a smile that showed all her dimples.

"Good. I leave to-morrow, you are off the day after. Don't tell him anything till you get back to Eastbourne. Then let him know exactly what has passed between us to-day, that I have admitted frankly I shall have a hard job on my part. I want to get my father's consent, because I wish you to be welcomed by the family. Dear old Aunt Henrietta will never interfere with me,

she's too good a sort."

"Yes," answered Isobel happily. "I will tell him all that."

"And please add that I should wish to come down to Eastbourne, as soon as convenient to him, and put all the facts before him. I want first to get his consent, and I know I am asking it under peculiar circumstances."

A slight cloud gathered over the girl's lovely face. "I am quite sure of my darling old dad," she said. "I'm a little afraid of yours."

"There's nothing to be frightened of, sweetheart," said her lover confidently. "Whether he gives his consent or not, you are going to be my wife. I'm quite independent of him. But, as I said just now, I would prefer to bring him round before, instead of after."

"But do you think that possible?" inquired Isobel anxiously.

Guy reflected. "It's a pretty even chance," he said presently. "And, you see. I've got Mary on my side."

Isobel lifted questioning eyes. "You have never spoken of Mary before. Who is she? I suppose your sister?"

"Yes, my sister, and the sweetest, dearest girl in the wide world. Just an angel without the wings, and they are growing, I believe. Not that she is meek and mild, and all that sort of thing. She can hit out as straight from the shoulder as a man when she chooses. But tell her a tale of two true lovers, and she will never be happy till she brings them together."

"What a darling!" cried Isobel, in deep admiration. "How I should love to meet her."

“No difficulty about that,” answered Guy easily. “As soon as I have arranged matters with the General, we will fix up a little lunch in London. You bring your father up; I’ll bring Mary up.”

“How lovely!” sighed Isobel. Truly, a new world, a delightful world, was opening to her.

The Clandons returned to their modest little nest at Eastbourne. On the first evening of their return, Isobel, sitting on a low footstool close to the General’s chair, told him the wonderful story of Guy Rossett’s love for her, of her love for Guy.

Her father listened sympathetically. He was intensely proud that his beloved daughter had chanced upon a wooer worthy of her. He had never dared to hope for such an alliance. Isobel was deserving of any Fairy Prince, but where was the Fairy Prince to come from?

But he was wise and experienced. It would not be all fair sailing, there were rocks ahead. Guy had himself admitted that the Earl of Saxham would prove a formidable obstacle. The General agreed that, were he in Lord Saxham’s place, he would not give his consent too readily.

He kissed his daughter tenderly, half pleased, half regretful to see the intense lovelight in her eyes as she spoke of her adored lover.

“Yes, tell Guy to come and see me as soon as he likes, and we will talk over the difficulties,” he said kindly. “I liked the young fellow very much, from the little I saw of him. I am sure he is a gentleman, and I believe him to be straight.”

Isobel looked up a little reproachfully. Her father's guarded words seemed to convey very faint praise of her peerless lover.

"Oh, dad," she cried reproachfully. "Guy is the soul of honour."

Rossett came down, and had a long interview with General Clandon. He was quite frank and manly. He would marry Isobel whether his father consented or not; so far as financial matters stood, he was perfectly independent. Still, for many reasons, it was better to exercise a little prudence, and coax the Earl into agreement.

The General agreed. "Much better, Rossett. The question of her being received by your family or not will make a great difference to her at the start. In the years to come, it may make a great difference to you. You don't want to cut yourself off from your kith and kin."

Rossett was of the same opinion. The General agreed to a private engagement. Guy gave his betrothed a beautiful ring which she did not dare openly to display. She looked at it several times a day, and kissed it every night before she went to sleep.

Guy had lost no time in approaching his father, and the Earl had received the news in the worst spirit. He had stormed, and broken out into one of his furious, ungovernable rages.

"You are simply an idiot. With my influence with the Government, there is no knowing where I can push you to." He seemed to take it for granted that his son could not help himself. "You must marry a woman in your own class, a woman who

can help you in your career. And then you propose to me some obscure chit of a girl, who lives in a cottage at Eastbourne.”

Guy argued calmly that Isobel was a lady, and of good family. Certainly her father was not a rich man, this much he had to admit.

The Earl would not listen to reason. He brushed aside all his son's pleadings. He recovered from his first rage, but he wound up the discussion in a voice of deadly calm.

“You can do as you choose, Guy. You are quite independent, and I daresay if you married a shop girl it would make no difference to your aunt. But please understand this. From the day you make Isobel Clandon your wife, all is over between us. I wash my hands of you. Not a penny of my money, not an atom of my influence. You understand.”

“I quite understand, sir. You force me to choose between yourself and Isobel. Well, if you persist in your determination, I shall choose Isobel. But I am in hopes you will change your mind.”

“Never,” snapped out the Earl viciously. “Go to the devil your own way, as soon as you like. Fancy a manlike you being caught by a baby face.” But Guy smiled to himself. Lord Saxham was a very obstinate man, also a very irritable one. But his bark was worse than his bite. He had often climbed down before. And there was Lady Mary to be reckoned with, who, as a rule, could twist her father round her little finger, even if the process involved some time.

Lord Saxham betook himself next day to the all-powerful Mr Greatorex. He hinted to that impassive gentleman that he wanted to get his son abroad. Mr Greatorex elevated his finely arched eyebrows. "The usual thing, I suppose? An entanglement of some sort?"

"Wants to marry a woman who will ruin his career," answered the Earl tersely.

"A chorus-girl or something of that sort?" queried Greatorex. He knew that Guy Rossett had mixed in a somewhat fast set, and was prepared to expect the worst of him. "Or, perhaps, a doubtful widow?" He had heard rumours of him and Violet Hargrave.

Lord Saxham shook his head. "No, neither; but just as bad from my point of view. A girl, technically a lady, but no family to speak of, no fortune. He'd marry for love, and tire of her in six months, misery for her as well as for him."

The Honourable Rupert Greatorex was the scion of a very ancient family himself. He had a proper detestation of *mésalliances*.

"I will do my best," he said cordially. "He shall have the first thing going."

He had watched the career of young Rossett, as he had watched the career of every young man in the Foreign Office. Guy had not shown himself, up to the present, very zealous. He was more inclined to play than to work, and he foregathered with some very queer people.

But he did not lack brains. From some of the strange people

with whom he associated, he had gleaned some rather valuable information which he had placed at Mr Greatorex's disposal.

If he was sent to Spain, he might turn out a useful member of the vast diplomatic corps, and he would be separated from this charming young woman, of no family to speak of, and no fortune. And Greatorex would be obliging a staunch supporter of the Government. Hence the appointment which Guy fondly believed he had secured through his own merits.

While his father was scheming to thwart what he considered his son's ill-advised wooing, Guy had enlisted Mary for an ally.

Mary, the friend of all true lovers, only asked two questions. First, Was she a lady? Second, Were they quite sure they really loved each other?

Her brother was able to answer both questions in the affirmative. And she was sure, this time, he was in earnest. She had been the recipient of previous confidences, hence a little caution on her part.

"I should like to meet her, and judge for myself," said Mary decidedly. She knew, of course, of her father's obstinate refusal to entertain the idea. She would like to meet Isobel, to be sure if she was justified in opposing the Earl. For Mary was, above all things, conscientious. She adored Guy, but she also loved her father, and she had a duty towards him. She must be certain that Isobel was worthy, no mere adventuress, luring a sorely love-stricken man.

Guy unfolded his cunning little plan.

“Run up to London one day for some shopping. I’ll get up Isobel and her father, and we can all lunch together. Where shall we go? The Ritz for preference, but we should meet too many people we knew, and it might get to the Governor’s ears. We’ll lunch at the Savoy.”

So that was arranged. There came that delightful day when the General and his daughter travelled up from Eastbourne, and met Guy and his sister in the vestibule of the famous London restaurant.

Isobel was dreadfully nervous, but quite excitedly happy. What a lovely new life! The tepid gaities of Eastbourne paled their ineffectual fires in comparison with the present festivity.

The two women took to each other at once. It did not take the shrewd Mary long to discover that this beautiful girl was genuinely in love with the equally good-looking Guy, that here was no artful and designing maiden.

The General, simple and dignified, made an equally good impression upon her. In manner and bearing he was the true type of aristocrat, as much so as Lord Saxham himself. Fortunately for others, he lacked the Earl’s somewhat explosive qualities.

They lingered in the lounge some time after lunch, and here the two women had a little private chat together, with the view of cementing their acquaintance.

Mary promised to be their friend, and to use all her influence to wear down her father’s opposition.

Isobel thanked her warmly. “It seems an unkind thing to say,”

she added, at the conclusion of her little outburst of gratitude. "But I almost wish that Guy were a poor man."

Mary looked at her questioningly; she did not, for the moment, catch the drift of her thoughts.

"There couldn't, then, be all this fuss and trouble," explained Isobel, with a little catch in her voice. "People wouldn't be able to think that I had run after him, they would know I only cared for him for himself. Now, whatever happens, they will always think the worst of me."

Mary whispered back the consoling answer, "There are two people who will never think that, myself and Guy."

The happy hours passed. They all saw Mary off by her train, and a little later the General and his daughter went back to Eastbourne.

There were many delightful days to follow, days when Guy ran down, dined with the General, and put up for the night at the "Queen's."

And then the time drew near for Guy to take up his new post, to leave London for Madrid. Still, things were not any further advanced. In spite of Lady Mary's powerful and persistent advocacy, the Earl remained as obdurate as ever. If Guy insisted upon making Isobel Clandon his wife, all friendly relations between father and son would be suspended.

On the night preceding the young diplomatist's departure, there was a farewell dinner, this time at a less public restaurant than the Savoy. The party was the same, Guy and his sister, Isobel

and her father.

Lady Mary would have to stay the night in London. This she had arranged to do with an old girl friend, now married, Lady May Brendon.

The Earl, with that uncanny sense which distinguishes some people, suddenly had an inkling of the truth. Guy had said good-bye to them the day before. "I believe it's all a blind," he burst out angrily, a few minutes before Mary's departure. "You may be staying with May Brendon for the night, but she is not the reason of your visit. You are going to meet that wretched girl."

Mary could never bring herself to tell a lie. She had already admitted she had made the acquaintance of Isobel Clandon, and had taken a great liking to her.

"To tell the truth, I am. Guy is giving a dinner to-night, in order to bid her farewell. It is only right he should have the support of some member of his family."

"You deliberately go against my wishes," thundered her father, in his most irate tones.

"In this instance, I fear I must," replied his daughter very quietly and firmly. "I love you very dearly, but I love Guy too. He has chosen for himself, and in my opinion he has chosen wisely."

"I love Guy too," said the Earl in a less aggressive tone. "I would like also to see him happy. But a man in his position must marry according to the traditions of his family. You are a weak sentimentalist, Mary."

A rather sad smile crept over the sweet face.

“Perhaps I am, too much for my own peace of mind. But, what I do feel strongly is this – you have no right to dictate to Guy in this matter. He is a second son, he is independent of you. With Ticehurst, it may be different. He has to transmit the family honours, to maintain the family traditions as you call them. In his case, interference may be justifiable. In Guy’s case, I say emphatically not.” The Earl began to splutter again. “My word, the world is coming to something. You talk as if a father had no right, no authority over his children. Look what I have done for him. I wrung this appointment from Greatorex, with my own personal influence.”

Lady Mary laid a light, cool kiss upon his inflamed cheek.

“Dearest father, do try and be just for once. You did not get this appointment solely for Guy’s benefit. You know you don’t care a straw whether he succeeds in his profession. Your real motive was to drive him out of England, so that he should be separated from Isobel Clandon.”

This was too much for Lord Saxham. He burst into volcanic language, inveighing against ungrateful sons and undutiful daughters, and stamped from the room in a blind rage.

Lady Mary smiled a little when he left. How many of these domestic storms had she witnessed! Her father would give way in the end. But there would be a long period of waiting. She got into the car, and drove to the railway station.

The dinner-party was a great success, even if it was slightly overcast with the sadness of farewell. Two people alone can be

quite comfortably sad; there is a luxury in woe. But melancholy cannot be permanently maintained amongst four persons. The lovers would not see each other for some time, but, as Mary cheerfully reminded them, Madrid was not quite as far as the Antipodes, and they could write to each other every day, if they wished.

Half-way through the meal, two men entered and took their seats at a small adjoining table; they were both in evening dress. One was a tall, slim Englishman of the well-groomed type. His companion was short and swarthy, evidently a foreigner.

Isobel was the first to observe them. She leaned across the table, and addressed the General in a low voice.

“Maurice has just come in, father. Just there, on your left, with a foreign-looking man.”

The General looked in the direction indicated, and caught the eye of the tall young man, who rose, and advanced hesitatingly to their table.

He shook hands with Isobel and her father. The General effected a hasty introduction.

“My nephew, Mr Farquhar, Lady Mary Rossett, Mr Rossett.”

Lady Mary bowed. Guy half rose and bowed. He felt a little bit churlish. He was of a very jealous disposition. He fancied Isobel’s reception of her cousin was perhaps a little too cordial. Her smile was very welcoming, as she murmured, “Fancy meeting you here, Maurice.”

Farquhar looked at the young diplomatist steadily, as if he

were trying to recall a memory. Then he recollected.

“Rossett, Guy Rossett, of course, I remember you now perfectly. You were with me at Harrow for one term. You came into Brogden’s House just as I was leaving.”

And then Guy remembered too. “Of course, I recollect now. I thought your face was familiar to me. You were the head of the house, and I was your fag. A graceless little cub, I fancy.”

Farquhar laughed genially. “No, I fancy you were an awful decent little chap while I was there. I can’t vouch for you after my restraining influence was removed.”

There was a little more conversation, and then Mr Farquhar returned to his foreign friend.

“Who the deuce has he got with him?” growled the General, almost under his breath. “Maurice is an awfully clever fellow, and they say is one of the most rising members of the junior bar, but he is awfully fond of Bohemian society. That long-haired chap he has got with him. Well, he looks like an anarchist.”

Guy Rossett laughed. “I fancy I know who he is, General; in the Foreign Office, like your nephew, we get to know some queer people. He is a Spaniard by birth, but English by adoption. He is a well-known journalist in Fleet Street. But he is by no means an anarchist; he is dead against them.”

The General ruminated. He was the most insular of insular Britons. He hated all persons of other nations. It annoyed him that his nephew should be in the company of this long-haired foreigner.

“It is time this old country of ours closed its doors to this kind of gentry,” he said, in a decided voice, as he drained his glass of champagne.

Lady Mary smiled. How very much he resembled her own father. The same obstinate views, with, at bottom, the same kind heart.

The next morning, the little party of three saw the young diplomatist off at the station. Guy held his sweetheart very close when he gave her his farewell kiss.

“I say, dearest, you will write every day, won’t you?”

And Isobel nodded her dark head.

“Of course, dear, pages and pages.”

“And I say, that good-looking cousin of yours we met last night! He has never made love to you, has he?”

Isobel laughed gaily. “Dear old Maurice! Why he used to carry me about when I was a baby. And dad and I are awfully fond of him. He is just a big, dear elder brother.”

“I don’t quite know that I like a big, dear elder brother, when he happens to be a cousin,” replied Guy, a little grimly.

Isobel smiled her most delightful smile.

“Oh, Guy, I believe you are really jealous, and of poor old Maurice, of all people. My dear boy, he only lives for his work; he is a barrister, you know, and is made up of parchment.”

“He looked very human when he shook hands with you,” remarked Guy drily. “I fancy there’s not much parchment where you are concerned.”

“Silly boy, to even think of such things. And what about me, when you get to Madrid? I am told the Spanish ladies are very fascinating. What chance shall I have against them.”

So she turned the tables on Guy, and he had to defend himself against disloyalty in the future.

Then the train steamed off. With a hearty handshake from the General, with the kisses of his sweetheart and sister warm upon his lips and his cheeks, Guy Rossett set out on his journey to Spain. Little could he foresee the adventures that were in store for him.

Chapter Four

“And you think mischief is brewing, eh?”

The speaker was Maurice Farquhar. The man he addressed was Andres Moreno, the black-browed Spaniard who had dined with him on the previous evening at the restaurant where they had met Guy Rossett and his party.

Maurice, a member of the junior bar, with a daily increasing practice, rented a charming suite of rooms in one of the most cloistered courts of the Temple. Certainly, this suite was on the top floor, and it was a stiff climb up those stairs. But Maurice was young and healthy, and the ascent of those few steep stairs did not trouble him in the least.

Apart from his own special legal business, which absorbed his best faculties, he was a man of many interests. During the lean years, when he had waited for briefs, he had supplemented his modest patrimony by journalism. He became a somewhat well-known figure in Fleet Street, specialising more or less upon foreign politics.

Then, when the briefs began to flow in, he had gradually dropped journalism. Now and again, at the earnest request of a persistent editor, he would write an article or a letter on some burning question, in which he could display his particular knowledge of affairs.

In those old journalistic days, happy, careless days, when a

dinner at the old "Cheshire Cheese" was accounted something of a luxury, when he never entered the portals of the Ritz or Carlton, save as the guest of some rich friend or relation, he had struck up a great comradeship with Andres Moreno, son of a Spanish father and an English mother, an adroit and clever journalist, who could turn his hand to anything.

Nothing came amiss to Moreno; he was the handy man of journalism. He could write a most flamboyant description of a fashionable bazaar. He could, in a sufficiently well-paid article, penetrate the subtle schemes of European monarchs and statesmen.

His knowledge of London and every other foreign capital was illuminating. He knew every prominent detective, he enjoyed the acquaintance of not a few members of the criminal classes. He was hail-fellow-well-met with staunch monarchists and avowed anarchists. But it was always difficult with this man, who had friends in so many camps, to discover what were his real opinions.

Maurice who, perhaps, knew him better than anybody, on the mental side, always declared that he had no fixed opinions.

"When you are with the good old-fashioned Tory," he had said once to him laughingly, "you are all for King and Church and State and good Government. When you are with the anarchist, your sympathies go with the poor devils who have got nothing, and want to blow up everybody, in the hopes of getting a bit out of the wreck."

And Moreno, in the same jocular spirit, had admitted there was a certain element of truth in the description.

“I am so infernally sympathetic, you know, Farquhar. I am like a straw blown by the wind. Any man who can talk to me earnestly for five minutes makes me see eye to eye with him. When I have left him, when the magnetism of his presence is removed, the cold fit succeeds, and I see with the eye of Andres Moreno. On the whole, I think I may say I am on the side of law and order.”

And Farquhar had replied in the same half-jocular vein. “Better stick on that side, old man. Otherwise they will end by taking from you even that little which you have.”

Since those days of early friendship, the two men had prospered exceedingly. Moreno was a very highly paid journalist. Farquhar was one of the rising members of the junior bar.

The young barrister repeated his question.

“And you think mischief is brewing, eh?” Moreno raised himself from what appeared to be a deep reverie. It was a peculiarity of the man that suddenly he would relapse into deep meditation, and for the moment seem oblivious of what was going on around him. Then, in a flash, his keen intellect would assert itself, and he would pick up, in a very easy fashion the dropped threads of the previous conversation.

“Very serious mischief, old man,” he said, in his deep, rather husky tones. He spoke English perfectly, by the way, without the slightest trace of foreign accent. As a matter of fact, he had been born and bred in the country of his mother.

“Is it a great secret?” questioned Farquhar.

Moreno looked at him kindly. He was very greatly attached to this quiet Englishman, who had taken him by the hand in those early days when some of the brethren of the pen had regarded him as an outsider, and shown their dislike very plainly.

“It is to everybody else, but not to you, my old and tried friend. I can trust you not to suck another man’s brains. Besides, you are out of the business now. Yes, there are great things going on, in Madrid, Barcelona and Seville. There are also great things going on in a little corner in London, I can assure you.”

Farquhar lifted his eyebrows, but he made no comment. Moreno would talk when it pleased him.

The Spaniard laughed softly, and leaned back in his chair. He was a man of deep and subtle humour, and was continually smiling at the ironies and incongruities of life.

“I am going to astonish you now, my good Maurice. To-morrow night I am going to be inducted as a member of an anarchist society in Soho.”

Farquhar, disturbed in his well-balanced mind, gave a violent start.

“Are you mad, Andres? Have you any idea of what you will commit yourself to?”

Moreno shrugged his broad shoulders indifferently.

“I shall know, and size it all up the day after to-morrow; I am a soldier of fortune, my friend. I am an enterprising journalist – anything for sensation, anything for ‘copy.’ I shall put my

anarchist friends to good use.”

“And they will kill you while you are doing it, or after you have done it,” said Farquhar grimly.

“You do not pay a very high compliment to my intelligence, my friend. I think I may say that I am clever. Anarchists are very stupid people. They will suspect each other long before they suspect Andres Moreno.”

He was a small man, but he looked quite important as he made this boast. Whatever his failings, a want of confidence in himself was not one of them. But Farquhar still appeared dubious.

“I was a little doubtful till last night when I saw your friends at the restaurant,” went on Moreno, in his slightly husky voice. “You did not introduce me, there was no opportunity for that. I recognised one of them, Guy Rossett, who, I take it, is the fiancé of that charming young lady who, you say, is your cousin.”

Farquhar frowned a little. How quick these foreigners were to guess things.

“I have no idea,” he said stiffly. “General Clandon is my uncle, and I have been on very intimate terms with him and his family since I was a child. If there were any engagement, I think I should have been informed.”

Moreno noticed the frown, the stiffness in the tone. He went on smoothly.

“I may be jumping at conclusions rather too hastily, but I will tell you how I arrived at them. I happen to know that Guy Rossett is appointed to the Embassy at Madrid. With his sister, he dines

with this charming girl and a man, obviously her father. It looks to me like a farewell dinner, and at a restaurant which is excellent, but certainly not fashionable. They wanted to escape observation, otherwise a man in Rossett's position, and he was certainly the host, would have been at the Ritz."

"And what do you deduce from these profound observations, worthy of Sherlock Holmes himself?" asked Farquhar a little testily.

Moreno answered slowly. He could see that his friend was troubled, but he had gone too far to recede.

"I should say there was a secret understanding between the young people, approved of by the girl's father, and the man's sister. Probably they are still waiting for the Earl's consent to an open engagement."

Farquhar, to hide his agitation, swallowed his whiskey and soda in one draught, and chewed viciously at the end of his cigar.

"You may be right," he said, speaking with forced calm. "Well, let us get back to your anarchists. What has made you join them?"

Moreno reflected a moment before he spoke.

"I happen to know that young Rossett was in possession of some very exclusive information about this particular plot. That is one of the reasons why he has been sent to Spain."

"And where do you come in?" questioned Farquhar.

Moreno smiled. "It is as much curiosity as anything. The anarchists know that Rossett knows a good deal about them.

Now, I want to find out how they are going to act when Rossett finds himself in Madrid, you see.”

“And you’ll find it out before you are many hours older, cunning old devil that you are,” said Farquhar, with an appreciative smile. “Well, let me know how you get on. Isobel Clandon is my cousin, and I can’t help feeling interested in all this, especially if what you suggest about her and Rossett is true.”

When Moreno had left, the ambitious young barrister sat thinking deeply. He had loved his cousin for years, not perhaps with any great overmastering passion, but with that steady affection which might be expected from a man of his grave and cautious temperament.

He was prepared to speak when the time was ripe, when his prospects and circumstances permitted him to offer Isobel a proper home. Moreno’s words troubled him, and he had an uneasy suspicion that the Spaniard, with his swift intelligence, had accurately gauged the situation. The fruit which might have been his for the mere stretching out of the hand – had it been plucked by somebody more impetuous, more energetic than himself?

This he must learn as soon as possible. Moreno’s words had suddenly roused him to action. He was now blaming in his mind, those very traits on which he had been wont to pride himself, his scrupulousness, his excessive caution.

He had always thought that Isobel liked him, that she would not be reluctant to entertain his advances, when he had judged

the time was right to make them.

And, of course, he had been a fool. He had not looked at the position from the girl's point of view. A girl, however much she may be inclined towards a man, is not disposed to wait indefinitely while he is making up his mind, nicely balancing pros and cons.

He had never thought of anybody else for his wife. But he had reckoned too surely on the fact that she was waiting quietly in that little home at Eastbourne, till he chose to make love to her.

He wired to General Clandon the next morning, explaining that he had a couple of days' leisure; might he run down? There came back the cordial reply, "Come at once. Delighted."

Truth to tell, the General was both proud and fond of his nephew, the son of his favourite sister. He might have thought at times that the young man was a little too grave and serious for his years, he had always seemed singularly free from the follies of youth. But he had the greatest respect for his sterling qualities, for his high principles and character.

Father and daughter met him at the station. Isobel liked him very much. There was a time when liking might have been converted into a warmer feeling. But, speaking in vulgar parlance, Maurice had failed through his over-scrupulousness, his too nice weighing of possibilities and probabilities, to strike while the iron was hot.

And then Guy Rossett, ardent, impetuous, the beau idéal of a lover, had carried her off her feet, and her cousin was hardly a

memory, so much did she live in the radiance of the present.

He had a most dainty dinner. Isobel was a wonderful housekeeper, and could accomplish wonders on a very limited income. Maurice, his desire sharpened by his forebodings, thought what a perfect wife she would make, uniting the decorative with the practical.

After dinner she left the men alone to their wine and cigars. Farquhar was not long in coming to the point. It was typical of his rather staid and old-fashioned way of regarding things that, even in the delicate matter of love, the correct method was to approach the parent first.

“I wonder, uncle, if you have ever thought of me in the light of a future son-in-law?”

The General looked a little embarrassed. Not very long ago, that aspect of his nephew had presented itself to him, and the prospect was not unpleasing. He had a shrewd notion that Maurice was very attached to his pretty cousin, and was marking time for some quite honourable and justifiable reasons.

Of Isobel he was not at all sure. Maurice had every good quality from a man's point of view, but he was not quite the stuff out of which romantic and compelling lovers are made. And her father was certain that Isobel was full of romance.

The General answered slowly, and with a caution worthy of Maurice himself. “I might have thought about it some time ago, my boy. I fancied then that you were greatly attached. Let me see, it was some three or four years ago that I formed that opinion,

I think.”

“Yes,” said Maurice, speaking with a quiet bitterness. “I suppose it was about then that I showed my feelings, as far as I am capable of showing them, plainly. But there were reasons why I did not speak then, reasons that I still think good ones.”

“I am sure of that, my dear boy,” said the uncle kindly. He guessed now the reason of this visit, that sudden telegram.

“At that time I was making headway, it is true, but my position was by no means assured. You know the smallness of my patrimony, and what I earned outside was inconsiderable. I did not feel justified in asking a girl to wait, on the chance of prospects that might never come to fruition.”

“Quite right, quite honourable!” murmured the poor General, dreading the inevitable end of this discourse. Maurice was stating the case, rather as if he were addressing a jury, but there was no doubt he meant business. Even a man of his cautious temperament could now safely allow himself the luxury of matrimony, that was evident from this preamble.

“It has always been my one thought to marry Isobel, assuming that she would have me, the moment I was in a position to take a wife. That moment has now arrived; I have no fears of the future. The question arises, am I too late?”

The General was terribly embarrassed by this direct question. He was a most straightforward man, he loathed subterfuge.

But what was he to do? The engagement of his daughter to Guy Rossett was a secret one. He was, in honour bound, to give

neither of them away.

He temporised weakly. "Have you spoken to Isobel about this?"

"No," came the answer. "I thought it was right to approach you first."

"Exactly, exactly," stammered the poor father. "Very right and proper, of course. But you had better put it to Isobel, and see what she says. Of course, you understand there is no opposition on my part."

Farquhar looked at him keenly. Yes, Moreno's suspicions were justified. There was a secret engagement. The General had thrown the onus on his daughter. She could tell as much or as little as she pleased.

"Thanks," he said quietly. "I will speak to Isobel to-morrow morning."

The next day, in a little sheltered arbour in the not too extensive garden, he asked his cousin to marry him. He explained to her, as he had explained to her father, the reasons which had held him back.

She listened to him with composure. She was dimly aware that, a few years ago, this declaration of love would have set her cheeks aflame, her heart beating. To-day, it left her regretful, but cold.

"I am dreadfully sorry, Maurice. I am very, very fond of you, but not in that way. I look upon you as a brother, a very dear brother."

There was decision and finality in the low, gentle tones. It was a bitter disappointment. He had always fancied in his masculine optimism that Isobel was waiting ready to fall into his arms, when he had made up his mind to ask her.

It was a bitter disappointment, but he bore it with his usual stoicism. Ambition was the greater factor in his life; love would always play a subordinate part. Still, Isobel's refusal had taken something away that could never be replaced.

There was a long pause. He was the first to break the silence. "Your affections are engaged. You are in love with somebody else?"

A vivid flush overspread the fair face. "It is quite true, I love somebody else."

"The man you were dining with, Guy Rossett?" replied Farquhar quietly.

"Ah, you have guessed! But it is quite a secret. My father knows. His sister knows. His father is obstinate and prejudiced; he wants him to marry a woman in his own world. We are waiting for his consent."

"I quite understand," said Farquhar gloomily. "I am too late, I can see. Honestly, Isobel, had I asked you, say, a year ago, would your answer have been different?"

Her frank and candid gaze met his steadfast glance. "I fancy I should have said yes, Maurice. But I am not certain it would have been real love; you see, I have known so few men. Guy has revealed a new world to me."

Farquhar sighed. He was eloquent enough in the courts, but he was dumb in the presence of women. This handsome young diplomatist had spoken to her in a language that she readily understood.

He silently said good-bye to his dream, the fair dream of the future which was to be glorified by Isobel Clandon's gracious presence.

"So that is all over. Well, Isobel, I hope you will always allow me to be your very good friend." She reached out her hand impulsively and laid it on his.

"Oh, yes, please, Maurice. You will always be a dear, kind brother, won't you?"

"Perhaps some day I may be able to help you. I have just learned there is some danger threatening Guy Rossett."

Her face blanched. She turned to him an imploring glance.

"Danger threatening Guy. Oh, please tell me, quickly."

With a bitter pang, he realised in that anguished utterance a full sense of the love which he had lost, of the youthful heart which he had allowed another man to capture.

In a few brief sentences, he told her what Moreno had related to him.

Chapter Five

At the period at which this story opens, there stood in Gerrard Street, Soho, a small, unpretentious restaurant, frequented almost exclusively by foreigners. Over the front was written the name of Maceda.

Luis Maceda, a tall, grave man of dignified aspect, with carefully trimmed beard and moustache, was the proprietor. He was a Spaniard, with the suave and courteous manners of that picturesque nation. The majority of his customers were his compatriots. The few Englishmen who found their way there spoke highly of him and the cuisine. At the same time, one or two of the prominent officials of the Secret Service kept a wary eye upon Maceda and his friends.

It was about half-past six on the evening following the interview between Moreno and Farquhar that Maceda, grave, upright, and dignified, looking younger than his fifty years, stood near the entrance door of the small restaurant, awaiting the arrival of early diners.

He was one of the old-fashioned type of restaurant keepers who kept a vigilant eye on his subordinates, went round to every table, inquiring of his patrons if they were well served. In short, he made his customers his friends.

Through the open doors entered Andres Moreno. He lunched and dined at a dozen different places, but usually twice a week he

went to Maceda's. The cuisine was French, to suit all tastes, but there were always some special Spanish dishes, to oblige those who were still Spaniards at heart.

The pair were old friends. Moreno extended his hand.

"How goes it, Maceda? But it always goes well with you. You look after your patrons so well."

For a few moments the two men conversed in Spanish, which Moreno, through his father, could speak perfectly. Then, after a pause, the journalist spoke a single word – it was a password, that Maceda understood instantly.

A sudden light came into the proprietor's eyes. He smiled genially, but gravely, as was his wont.

"So you are with us, at last," he said. "A thousand welcomes, my friend. We want men like you. I was told there would be a new member to-night, but the name was not divulged. This way."

The restaurant keeper led him up a narrow staircase – the house was a very old one – to a big room on the second floor. A long table stood in the middle of the apartment, on which were set bowls of flowers and dishes of fruit. Moreno looked around gratefully. As far as creature comforts went, he was going to have a pleasant evening. Maceda was evidently going to do his best.

Maceda pointed to a little side-room.

"It is there the initiation will be performed at seven. At half-past, dinner will be served. After dinner, the business of the meeting will take place. You are a bit early. I know this much, that you are here on the introduction of Emilio Luçe."

“Quite right,” answered Moreno easily. “It was Luçue who persuaded me to the right way.”

Maceda raised his hands in admiration at the mention of that name.

“Ah, what a man, what a genius!” he cried in fervent tones. “If our cause ever triumphs, if the world-wide revolution is ever brought about – and sometimes, my friend, I feel very disheartened – it is men like Luçue who will make it a possibility.”

“Trust to Luçue,” answered Moreno, in his easy way. “If he can’t do it, nobody can.”

Maceda moved towards the door. “Excuse me that I can no longer keep you company. But business is business, you know. I must be there to welcome my patrons. Maceda’s restaurant is nothing without Maceda. You know that. My subordinates are good, and do their best, but it is my personality that keeps the thing going. If I am away for ten minutes, everything hangs fire.” Moreno waved a cheerful hand at him.

“Do not stand upon ceremony, my good old friend. I shall be quite happy here till the others arrive. No doubt I shall see you later.”

The proprietor walked to the door, with his long, slow stride. “The three will be here at seven to initiate you. I shall run up for a few moments now and again during the dinner. The two men who will wait upon you are, of course, members of our society. I shall hope to be present, if only for a brief space, at the meeting.

Once again, a thousand welcomes.”

Maceda shut the door carefully. Moreno was left alone, in the long, narrow room. He gave vent to a low whistle, when Maceda was out of earshot.

“The old boy takes it very seriously,” so ran his reflections. “I suppose they will all take it quite as seriously. Anyway, they intend to do themselves well. I wonder where the money comes from? And I further wonder if I shall meet anybody whom one would the least expect to find in such a venture.”

On the stroke of seven Luçue arrived, a fine, handsome man of imposing presence. He was accompanied by two men, one an Italian, the other a Russian. It was evidently going to be a meeting of many nations.

Luçue greeted the journalist with a friendly smile. “Ah, my friend, you are before us. That is a good sign. I hope you do not feel nervous.”

Moreno answered truthfully that he did not. The whole thing appealed greatly to his sense of humour. Here were a dozen anarchists, meeting in a small restaurant in Soho, and pluming themselves upon the idea that, from their obscure vantage-ground, they could blow up the world into fragments and overpower the forces of law and order, to bring it into accordance with their wild dreams.

The four men went into the ante-room. Here the solemn rights of initiation were performed with perfect seriousness. Afterwards, when he reflected on the subject, Moreno

remembered that he had taken some very blood-curdling oaths.

His gay and easy temperament was not greatly affected by the fact. He had been in the pay of the Secret Service before; he was in its pay now. A man must take risks, if he wanted to make a good living. Besides, he loved adventure. If the apparently genial Luçue ever had cause to suspect him, then Luçue would stick a knife into his ribs without the slightest compunction. But he felt sure he was the cleverer of the two, and that Luçue would suspect every member of the fraternity before himself.

The somewhat tedious initiation over, the four men went into the dining-room. Most of the members had arrived. The two waiters were bringing up the soup.

Moreno recognised with a start the portly form of Jackson, otherwise Juan Jaques, the moneylender of Dover Street. Luçue had told him that the common language was French, in order to accommodate all nationalities.

Moreno addressed him. "I don't think you remember me, Mr Jackson. I had the pleasure of introducing young Harry Mount Vernon to you some months ago, when he was wanting a little of the ready. He has always spoken in the highest terms of you." Mr Jackson, always suave and genial, bowed and smiled. But it was evident he was searching the recesses of his memory.

Moreno helped him out of his difficulty.

"I am Andres Moreno, a Fleet Street journalist, who mixes with all sorts and conditions of men."

"Ah, I remember now." Jackson, to call him by his assumed

name, shook him cordially by the hand. "And so, you are one of us?"

"Yes, very much so," replied Moreno quietly.

"Our friend Luçue converted me to the good cause. He is a wonderful man."

Jackson repeated the enthusiasm of Maceda.

"A genius, my dear friend, an absolute genius. If the great cause triumphs, it will be due to him." Another worshipper, thought Moreno, with a quiet, inward chuckle. They were all certainly very serious, with a whole-hearted worship of their leader.

The great leader looked round the room with his broad, genial smile.

"All here, except the two ladies," he said. "We must wait for the ladies. It is their privilege to be late. We must exercise patience."

As he spoke, two women entered the room, one obviously a Frenchwoman, the other as obviously an Englishwoman.

Jackson darted across the apartment, a somewhat grotesque figure, bowed to the foreigner, and shook the Englishwoman cordially by the hand.

"Always late, my dear Violet," he said, "but better late than never."

Then Luçue bustled up, and took the situation in hand.

"Now, Jackson, you mustn't monopolise one of the two charming young women in the room. I want my new friend,

Moreno, to sit next his half-compatriot, because, as you know, although his father was Spanish, his mother was English.”

The pretty Englishwoman bowed, and they took their seats together at the flower and fruit-laden table. Luçue, probably through inadvertence had not mentioned the woman’s name.

Moreno stole cautious glances at his companion. She was certainly very charming to look at; her age he guessed at anything from five and twenty to thirty. Where had he seen her before? Her face was quite familiar to him.

And then recollection came back to him. A big bazaar in the Albert Hall, stalls with dozens of charming women. And one particular stall where this particular woman was serving, and he had been struck with her, and inquired her name of a brother journalist, who was a great expert on the social side. He turned to her, speaking in English.

“Our good friend Luçue was rather perfunctory in his introduction. He mentioned my name, but he did not give yours. Am I not right in saying that I am speaking to Mrs Hargrave?”

Violet Hargrave shot at him a glance that was slightly tinged with suspicion.

“I think we had better talk in French, if you don’t mind – it is the rule here. It might annoy others if we didn’t. Where did you know me, and what do you know about me?”

Moreno felt on sure ground at once. He was dealing with a woman of the world. In two minutes, he could put her at her ease.

“I am a journalist, rather well-known in Fleet Street.”

“Yes, I know that,” answered Violet a little impatiently. “Luçue mentioned your name, and it is, as you say, a well-known one. But you have not answered my question. Where did you first know me?”

Moreno explained the little incident of the Albert Hall Bazaar.

“I see, then, you rather singled me out from the others,” said Mrs Hargrave, and this time the glance was more coquettish than suspicious. “But I am more interested in this – what do you know about me?”

Moreno put his cards on the table at once.

“We journalists pick up a lot of odd information. I know that you are an intimate friend of our friend Jackson, otherwise Juan Jaques, and one of us; and that to a certain extent you help him in his business, by introducing valuable clients.”

“Oh, you know that, do you?” Mrs Hargrave’s tone was quite friendly. She respected brains, and this dark-faced young Anglo-Spaniard was not only good-looking, but very clever. “Tell me some more.”

“Well, I know that you still live in Mount Street, that you married Jack Hargrave, who was never supposed by his friends to have any visible means of subsistence. Also that at one time, you were a great friend of Guy Rossett, the man who has just been appointed to Madrid.”

“Oh, then you know Guy Rossett?”

“No,” answered Moreno quietly. “I don’t move in such exalted circles. But I always hear of what is going on in high society,

through my influential friends.”

She looked at him quizzically. “Have you many influential friends?” she asked, with just a touch of sarcasm in her pleasant, low-pitched voice.

A slight flush dyed Moreno’s swarthy cheek at what he considered her impertinent question.

“More perhaps than you would think possible,” he answered stiffly.

She read in his nettled tone that she had wounded his *amour propre*. She hastened to make amends. She was always a little too prone to speak without reflection.

“Oh please don’t think I meant to be rude. But we soldiers of fortune, and all of us here are that, are not likely to have many friends in high places.”

The journalist paid her back in her own coin.

“Not real friends, of course. But still, we swim about in many cross currents. You yourself have a certain position in a certain section of what we might call semi-smart society.”

Violet Hargrave laughed good-humouredly. She was liberal-minded in this respect, that she seldom resented a thrust at herself when she had been the aggressor.

“Very neatly put. I have no illusions about my actual position. I am not sure that my particular circle is even semi-smart, except in its own estimation.”

So peace was restored between them, and they chatted gaily together during the progress of the meal. She had taken a great

liking to the brainy young journalist. And Moreno, on his side, was forced to admit that she was a very attractive woman.

The grave and dignified Maceda, looking more like a nobleman than the proprietor of an obscure restaurant, came up a few times, and talked in confidential whispers with the principal guests. He chatted longest with Luçue and the handsome young Frenchwoman, Valerie Delmonte, who, Moreno learned afterwards, stood high in the councils and the estimation of the society.

After dinner, the waiters withdrew, the men smoked, and the two ladies produced dainty cigarette cases. Then the business of the evening began.

The genial Luçue, who looked the least ferocious of anarchists, opened the proceedings. He gave a brief but lucid survey of what was going on abroad, of the methods by which the great gospel of freedom was being spread in different capitals.

The young Frenchwoman, Valerie Delmonte, who had dined well on the most expensive viands, delivered a fiery and passionate harangue against the great ones of the earth, the parasites and bloodsuckers who existed on the toil of their poorer brethren.

Her speech roused the assembly to enthusiasm, Mr Jackson being particularly fervent in his applause. No doubt, he believed himself to be a philanthropist, insomuch as he levied his exactions on the leisured classes; thus, in a measure, redressing the balance of human wrongs.

Moreno applauded with hardly less fervour than the moneylender, and he was pleased to note that the eloquent Valerie shot a grateful glance at him. He had already gained the confidence of Luçue. He felt sure, from the reception accorded her, that she was only second to the great man himself. If he could secure her good graces, his position would be safe.

Some business, not of great importance, was discussed. Certain projects were put to the vote. On one subject, Luçue and Mademoiselle Valerie dissented from the majority. Moreno decided with the two, and the majority reversed its verdict.

Violet Hargrave was, perhaps, the least enthusiastic of the party. Truth to tell, she was studying the young journalist very intently. He interested her greatly.

The proceedings ended. A meeting was arranged for next week at the same place, when two members of the brotherhood were expected to arrive from Barcelona with the latest reports of what was happening in Spain.

After a little desultory chatting in groups, Maceda's guests prepared to depart.

Moreno held out his hand to Mrs Hargrave. He bore the air of a man who had thoroughly enjoyed himself, as in truth he had.

"A most delightful evening. I can only hope you will sit beside me next week. But that I fear is too much to hope for. I expect our good friend Luçue arranges these things with a sense of equity."

Mrs Hargrave smiled. "I expect next time he will put you next to Mademoiselle Delmonte." Ignoring his outstretched hand, she

added abruptly, "Are you doing anything after this?"

"I was only going on to my club for an hour or two. We journalists are not very early birds."

Mrs Hargrave spoke with her most charming smile. "Then get me a taxi, and drive with me to my flat in Mount Street. I should like to have a little chat with you."

Moreno was delighted to accompany her. He was eager to know more of this fascinating and enigmatical woman. He was puzzled by her. How did she live; on what did she live? Was she at heart an anarchist? Or, sudden thought, was she playing the same game as himself? He had noticed her lack of enthusiasm over the events of the evening.

Arrived in Mount Street, she produced her latchkey, and ushered him into her luxurious flat, the abode of a well-off woman. She turned into the drawing-room, and switched on the electric light.

She threw her cloak on a chair and rang the bell. When the maid appeared in answer, she ordered her to bring refreshment.

She mixed a whiskey and soda for Moreno with her own slender dainty hands. She mixed a very small portion for herself, to keep him company.

"I very rarely take anything of this sort, just a glass of very light wine at lunch or dinner," she explained. "But to-night is a somewhat exceptional one. To your health, Mr Moreno. I hope we may meet often."

The journalist responded in suitable terms. He was very

attracted by her, but he was not quite sure that he desired a close acquaintance. He had heard from his young friend Mount Vernon of her bridge parties, and the fact that people lost large sums of money there. She was evidently of a most hospitable nature, but she might prove a very expensive hostess.

They chatted for some time on different topics. Then, after a brief space, she suddenly burst out with a question.

“What do you know of Guy Rossett?”

Moreno shrugged his shoulders. “Next to nothing. I only know what everybody knows, that he has been sent to Madrid.”

Question and answer followed swiftly.

“Do you know why he has been sent to Madrid?”

“No. I suppose it is owing to his family influence.”

“Has Luçue told you nothing?”

“Up to the present nothing.”

She looked at him keenly. Was he fencing? No, she felt sure he was speaking the truth.

“Then I will tell you. Guy Rossett is being sent to Spain because he has obtained some very important information about the brotherhood. They want him on the spot, as just now Madrid and Barcelona are two very active centres.”

Moreno leaned forward, and looked at her steadily. He could not, at present, make up his mind about her. She was an Englishwoman living in fairly luxurious conditions. What had she in common with this anarchist crew.

“Have you got any idea who gave him the information?”

Violet Hargrave returned his keen glance with equal steadiness.

“Not the slightest. But there are always traitors in any association of this kind.”

“And when they are discovered, the penalty is death.” Moreno spoke quietly, but he felt an inward shiver. After all, was he so certain he was going to outwit Luçue and his brother fanatics.

“The penalty is death. You have been initiated to-night, and you know that,” was Violet Hargrave’s answer.

The journalist felt a little uneasy. He had suspected her. Did she, in turn, suspect him? But he preserved an unbroken front.

“They deserve it,” he said, with unblushing audacity.

Mrs Hargrave bent forward, and spoke with intensity.

“Guy Rossett may prove very dangerous. I think Luçue and Mademoiselle Delmonte, from the few words I have exchanged with them to-night, have resolved on a certain course of action.”

“Ah!” The journalist also bent forward, in an attitude of simulated eagerness.

When Mrs Hargrave spoke again, she looked a different woman. Over her face came a hard, vindictive look. The dainty, almost doll-like prettiness had disappeared.

“Guy Rossett must be got out of the way, before he can do much mischief.”

And Moreno, with his swift intuition, at once grasped the situation. This slender, feminine thing, with her soft ways and graces, was a revengeful and scorned woman. She had loved

Rossett, and he had refused to accept her love. He shuddered in his soul to think that the spirit of revenge could carry a woman to such lengths.

But he had only to play his part. It would never do to let her know that he suspected, or the tigress's claws would rend himself.

“A regrettable but inexorable necessity,” he said calmly. “If Rossett menaces the schemes of the brotherhood, he must be got out of the way.”

Chapter Six

“You got all this information from perfectly reliable sources, Rossett?”

The question was asked by the Honourable Percy Stonehenge, His Majesty’s Ambassador to the Spanish Court, as the two men sat together in the Ambassador’s private room.

“Perfectly reliable, sir. I have given you in strict confidence the names of my informants. They are not the sort of men who make mistakes.”

Mr Stonehenge, true type of the urbane and courteous diplomatist, a man of old family, knitted his brow, and pondered a little before he spoke again.

“I had a private letter from Greatorex about this matter. There is no doubt great activity everywhere, but especially in this country. Well, the information you have collected is most valuable. It will be given to the King and his advisers, and they must take the best measures they can.”

Stonehenge shook his head sadly, after a prolonged pause. “Revolution, my dear fellow, is in the air all over Europe. Even in our commonsense and law-abiding country, there are ominous growlings and mutterings. Everywhere, the proletariat is getting out of hand. Sometimes I feel grateful that I am an old man, that what I dread is coming will not come in my time.”

Rossett assented gravely. He was taking himself quite

seriously now. His deep love for Isobel Clandon had purified him of light fancies. His promotion to this post at Madrid had suggested to him that he might bid adieu to frivolous pursuits, and do a man's work in the world, prove himself a worthy citizen of that vast British Empire of which he was justly proud.

Personally, he would have preferred Paris or Rome, or even Vienna. But, at the same time, he was greatly attracted by Spain.

A small nation now, it had once been a great one, attaining its zenith under the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. It had produced great geniuses in the immortal domain of the arts – Cervantes, Lopez de Vega, Murillo.

Once it had lain prostrate under the iron heel of the Conqueror. Napoleon, who had overrun all Europe, had subjugated the once invincible Spain, crushing her and governing her through the puppet King, his brother, Joseph Bonaparte.

Then had come the time of liberation, and the thunder of the British guns, under the leadership of Wellington, had freed her from the foreign yoke.

Rossett was very delighted with his chief, one of those sane men of affairs, a perfect aristocrat with just sufficient business instinct, who can safely be appointed to an important post. A man who thought clearly, saw far ahead, and made few mistakes, a man at once calm, temperate, and equable.

This Ambassador, on his side, had welcomed him warmly. With the natural prejudice of his class, he always preferred his colleagues to come from the old governing families; they thought

his thoughts, they spoke his language. If sometimes they lacked a little in brains and initiative, they had a large balance on the right side in deportment and integrity, two very important assets, especially in a monarchical country.

Besides, he was an old friend of Lord Saxham. They had been colleagues together in their youth. Lord Saxham was of a too violent and volcanic temperament to rise high in the diplomatic or any other profession. Had he possessed a little more balance, he might have sat in many cabinets. But no Prime Minister who knew his business could run the risk of including him. But, none the less, he exercised a certain outside influence.

Rossett wrote every day to his beloved Isobel; if he had time, long letters; if diplomatic affairs were pressing, short ones, assuring her of his unalterable affection. Isobel wrote every day also, most voluminous epistles, covering six or eight sheets of the flimsy notepaper.

He wrote once a week to his dear sister, Mary, only second in his heart to Isobel. And Mary also replied at great length, but she was not quite so voluminous as Isobel. Her letters were generally taken up with reviewing, with her kind, gentle humour, the tantrums of her father, who appeared to be growing more explosive than ever.

Rossett had exchanged one letter with his father, to which he got a reply. Lord Saxham was not a great letter-writer, he kept to the point, and used as few words as possible.

“Glad to hear you are getting on with Stonehenge – a very

good fellow! Stick to it, my dear boy, and I will work for you at this end with Greatorex. We shall see you an Ambassador yet.”

Guy smiled when he got this brief reply. He knew as well as Mary that his father did not care twopence as to whether he got on in his profession or not. He was only glad his son was out in Spain, because his sojourn in that country separated him from Isobel Clandon. How frightfully obstinate he was!

He often longed for his sweetheart, but still the days were very pleasant. He speedily found himself popular in the society of Madrid. He had been received graciously by the King, who knew England well, equally graciously by the Queen, in her maidenhood a Princess of our own British stock.

One man in particular had sought to attach himself to him, a man a few years older than himself, a certain Duke del Pineda.

Pineda was a handsome-looking fellow who bore himself well, dressed immaculately, and was received at Court and by the best society. Unquestionably, so far as birth and antecedents were concerned, he was a Spanish Grandee of the first water. And his manners were charming.

But, all the same, there were certain whispers about him. To begin with, it was well-known that he was impecunious. And a Spanish duke, like an English one, is always looked at askance when he is suspected of impecuniosity. A Duke has no reason to be short of ready money.

Stonehenge, who had watched the growing intimacy between the two men, spoke to Rossett one day about it.

“You seem very great friends with Pineda, I observe, Guy.” The Ambassador had fallen into the habit of calling him by his Christian name.

Rossett looked at his chief squarely. “Yes, sir, we go about a good deal together. Of course, you have a reason in putting the question.”

“He is not on the list of ‘suspects’ you gave me.”

Guy smiled quietly. “No, but I think he will be very soon.”

Mr Stonehenge gave a sigh of relief. “I see you know your business. I don’t know that Pineda has yet definitely decided, but he will swim with the tide. If there is a revolution he will try to lead it, like Mirabeau. In the meantime, he keeps in with both parties.”

“I have led him on to a few disclosures already,” observed Rossett.

“Ah, that is good. I can see that if you stick to it, you will fly high. Of course, you know he is as poor as a church mouse.”

There was a little grimness in Rossett’s smile as he answered: “I am quite sure of that.” Stonehenge looked at him keenly. “Ah, I don’t want to be curious, but he has borrowed money of you?”

The other nodded. “A trifle, sir. I thought it was worth it. I shall lose it, of course, and although I have done it in the interests of my country, I don’t suppose the Government will make it up to me.” The Ambassador laughed. “Virtue is its own reward in this profession, my dear Guy. They can subscribe any amount to the party funds, but they won’t give an extra penny to the men who

serve them well. Anyway, I am glad you have taken the measure of Pineda. He has really no brains.”

“An absolute ass,” corrected Rossett, “an absolute ass, with more than a normal share of vanity.”

“A most accurate description,” assented the chief. “But, with his birth and connections, he might temporarily make a decent figurehead. Monarchies have had their *rois fainéants*. Revolutions when they start have upper class and middle-class puppets to lead them. Afterwards, as we know, these are displaced by the extreme element.”

Rossett had found no difficulty in financing the impecunious Spanish grandee. For Great-Aunt Henrietta, on hearing of his promotion, had forwarded him a very substantial cheque.

Out of this, he had paid off Mr Jackson, and was able to take up his new post with a clean sheet. Needless to say that his sister Mary, the most honourable of women, was delighted at the position of affairs.

While events were progressing in Spain, Moreno the journalist had called on his old friend Farquhar at the familiar chambers in the Temple. It was a few days after Moreno’s initiation into the brotherhood by Luçue – the initiation which had been followed by that very significant interview with Violet Hargrave.

The visitor’s keen glance detected at once that his old friend looked gloomy and depressed. And, in truth, Farquhar was in no jubilant mood. His rejection by his pretty cousin, Isobel, the knowledge that another man had secured what he so coveted,

was weighing upon him heavily.

He pulled himself together on Moreno's entrance, and extended a cordial hand. He was a very reticent man, and always hid his feelings as much as possible.

"Great things have happened since I last saw you, my friend," cried the journalist gaily. "I am now a full-fledged member of the brotherhood, the great brotherhood. You remember I told you I was going to be initiated?"

Yes, Farquhar remembered. Moreno had mentioned the fact, and he had been interested. He had thought at the time his friend was running great risks, but no doubt the journalist was playing his own game in his own subtle way.

Since that conversation, his own affairs had made him forgetful of everything save the daily duties of his profession, duties which he never neglected.

He smiled genially. "When are you going to blow us all up? You haven't brought a bomb in your pocket by any chance?"

Moreno shook his head. "Much too crude, my good old friend. We work in a more subtle way than that, by peaceful and pacific means."

He knew Maurice Farquhar well enough, so sure was he of the sterling character of the man, to trust him with his life. This reserved, somewhat priggish barrister would no more reveal a confidence than a Roman Catholic priest would betray the secrets of the confessional.

At the same time a man in his delicate and dangerous position

must be doubly and trebly cautious. He must put even Farquhar off the scent, till the day arrived when he could speak freely.

He spoke a moment after, in a rather abrupt tone. "Forgive me for putting a certain question to you, and, believe me, it is not dictated from any spirit of impertinent curiosity. You remember our meeting your cousin and Guy Rossett? I told you I formed certain conclusions with regard to their relationship. Have you by any chance had an opportunity of testing the accuracy of the opinion I formed?"

For a moment Farquhar was at the point of telling this most inquisitive journalist to mind his own business, and not to pry into matters that, to all appearances, were no concern of his.

Then he remembered that he had known the man for many years, and during the period of a very intimate acquaintance he had never known him guilty of a breach of good taste.

Moreno had expressly stated he was animated with no spirit of impertinent curiosity. In short, he had apologised for putting the question. He then had some subtle and convincing reason for putting it.

Farquhar spoke more frankly than he had at first thought would be possible under the circumstances.

"After what you said, I made it my business to inquire. I am very greatly attached to my uncle and cousin. Whatever affects the welfare of either is deeply interesting to me."

He paused a few seconds. It was hard to admit to Moreno that his suspicions were justified. And he was gaining a little time by

expressing himself in these cautious and judicial words, words of course which told the keen young journalist what he wanted to know, without need of further speech.

“It is, as you surmised, an absolute secret to all but a very few,” resumed Farquhar, after that brief pause. “You diagnosed the situation perfectly. Rossett’s father is, at the present moment, the stumbling-block.”

“Thanks for your perfect frankness,” answered Moreno easily. The next question was one still more difficult to put, for he had guessed the situation as regards Farquhar quite easily. The barrister was in love with Isobel Clandon himself, had delayed too long in his wooing, and too late learned the bitter truth, that a more enterprising lover had carried her off.

“I take it that since you are greatly attached to your cousin, as well as your uncle, you would be disposed to help Rossett, in the event of his needing a friend?”

There was no reserve in the voice that replied.

“Yes, any man whom my cousin loves, whether he is her lover or husband, will find in me a friend.”

Moreno nodded his head. He could not say how much he appreciated this attitude, for he was sure that Farquhar was genuinely in love with Isobel. And he was sure now of what he had known all along, that the man was perfectly straight and honest, devoid of any petty or dishonouring meanness. Self-sacrifice could go no further than this – to assist Isobel’s lover.

“I am very glad to hear that, Farquhar. For the moment, my

lips are sealed. Even to you, my greatest friend, I cannot tell all. But the day may come when danger will threaten Guy Rossett. It will be well then to know who are the friends on whom he can rely. It may be, when that day comes, you can help, perhaps you cannot. But, if you can, I shall count upon you.”

“I have given you my promise,” replied Farquhar simply. “For the sake of Isobel Clandon, I will help Guy Rossett, if my assistance is of any use.”

A couple of hours later, Moreno left his friend’s chambers, after talking on other and impersonal subjects.

Shortly after that interview between the two men, there was a meeting at Maceda’s restaurant. It was a special function, convened especially by the great Luçue himself. There were only six people present, the chief himself, Maceda, who, on this very particular occasion, had delegated the conduct of his establishment to his second in command, Jackson, otherwise Jacques the moneylender, the Frenchwoman, Valerie Delmonte, Violet Hargrave, and Andres Moreno, the latest recruit.

The repast this time was of a much simpler nature. It lacked the elegance and profusion characteristic of the ordinary assemblages, when the affairs of the brotherhood was discussed in a general fashion. It was evident from these symptoms, concluded Moreno, that something of importance, some stern business was in the air.

When the comparatively simple meal had been finished; Luçue opened the proceedings, speaking as usual in French.

“I had hoped that our brother from Barcelona, Jaime Alvedero, would have been with us to-night,” he explained to his fellow-conspirators. “But grave affairs have detained him. He is, as you know, technically my superior, but he has written to me, authorising me to act with full authority in this very important matter of Guy Rossett. For the benefit of our latest member, Andres Moreno, I will just explain how, at the present moment, this young Englishman is a serious menace to the brotherhood.”

Moreno looked expectantly in his chief’s direction. He already knew a great deal of what Luçue was going to explain at length for the journalist’s benefit, but he was too wide-awake to betray this. He appeared profoundly moved by his chief’s disclosures.

He assumed an expression of the greatest gravity when Luçue had finished, for he knew that this apparently genial and most astute person was watching him narrowly.

“It is a very serious menace, his appointment to the Court of Spain, as he will be on the spot,” he commented quietly at the conclusion of the long harangue. “It must be counteracted in some way and speedily. As the newest member of this association, it does not become me to offer suggestions. I leave these to wiser and more experienced heads.” He looked meaningly at the other three men, who he knew were the acknowledged chiefs of this particular section of the great brotherhood.

Luçue indulged in a smile of approval. Like most great men, he was not a little vain, and easily won by judicious flattery.

“Our brother Moreno is very modest,” he said pleasantly. “But I have no doubt in a short space we shall find him one of our wisest counsellors. Well, ladies and gentlemen, we have a short way with people who try to thwart our well-laid plans.”

Moreno played splendidly. He knew that, as the newest recruit, and with English blood running in his veins, he had to justify himself.

“That is true statesmanship,” he said, in a voice of deep conviction. “For although, for the time, we do not hold the reins of power, I am convinced that we are better and more far-seeing statesmen than those whom at the moment misgovern and oppress the world.”

There was loud applause at this speech. The good-looking Frenchwoman clapped her hands loudly. Jackson and Maceda grunted audible approval. Luçue’s aspect grew more benign. Violet Hargrave smiled her charming smile, which might mean anything, approval or disapproval. At least, so Moreno thought.

He was not quite sure of her yet. Was she, through some inexplicable warp of temperament, devoted heart and soul to the schemes of this infamous association, or was she, like himself, playing a double game?

“Since we are all united on our policy,” broke in Luçue’s bland tones, “it only remains to settle the means.”

There was a stir in the small assembly. The Frenchwoman leaned forward eagerly; Moreno did the same. He had no doubt of her fidelity to the cause. He could not follow a safer guide.

But after a longer discussion, they were unable to form any settled plan. They all felt it was almost impossible to engineer the matter from England. Finally, they agreed to refer it back to Alvedero, who had the advantage of being on the spot.

Then Luçue made a suggestion. "I propose that our comrades, Violet Hargrave and Andres Moreno, set out for Spain to confer with the leaders there. I suggest them for this reason – being partly English, they will be able to move about more freely, be less liable to suspicion on account of that fact."

Moreno and Violet Hargrave nodded their heads in confirmation of their acceptance of the task assigned them.

Moreno shuddered inwardly, as he recalled the blood-curdling oaths which had been administered to him. On Violet Hargrave's face had come a sudden expression which he could not quite define. He was inclined to think that it reflected a certain happiness in the prospect of doing harm to Guy Rossett.

The meeting broke up, and they went down the stairs together. When they reached the door, Violet spoke.

"Come to my flat to-night, as you did when you were first initiated," she said, in the voice that sounded so sweet and womanly. "It is evident that you and I are going to be very closely associated," – she shot at him a coquettish glance – "whether you desire it or not."

A man wholly Spanish on his father's side was not likely to be deficient in gallantry.

"There is nothing I desire more, Mrs Hargrave. Apart from the

importance of our common aims and aspirations, there is nothing in our brief association with the brotherhood that has given me greater pleasure than the fact that I have been enabled to make your acquaintance.”

They hailed a passing taxi, stepped in, and drove to the flat in Mount Street.

Chapter Seven

Two men sat at a small table in an inferior restaurant in one of the lower quarters of Madrid.

One was dressed in the rough garb of a working-man. This was Andres Moreno, who, in his adventurous life, had played many parts. With his sardonic humour he was enjoying this particular rôle. The danger that he ran added a spice to his enjoyment.

The other man, Guy Rossett, was disguised also, but not quite so successfully. Moreno, due to his birth, could never be mistaken for anything but a Spaniard. On the other hand, Rossett could be easily recognised as a member of the bulldog race, a typical Englishman.

That morning, at the Embassy, a note had been delivered by a trusted messenger. It was a very brief one, and ran thus:

“Dear Mr Rossett, – You will remember a certain evening at the Savoy, when you were dining with your sister, a young lady whose name I will not mention, and her father. My host came over and spoke with you all for a few seconds. I am in Spain on important business. I should like to have a brief chat with you this afternoon.”

The writer had suggested the meeting in one of the unfashionable quarters of the town.

He had appended his initials in a scrawling fashion. But at once recollection had come to Guy Rossett. He remembered that

evening distinctly, when Maurice Farquhar had come over to their table, when General Clandon had expressed his displeasure at his nephew's associate, a man of whom Guy had some recollection.

The scrawling initials might have stood for anything. But Rossett deciphered them at once. The writer was Andres Moreno, a member of the Secret Service, also often in the pay of Scotland Yard.

Guy called for a bottle of wine. Not trusting to the cigars of the country, he produced his own case, and proffered it to the pretended working-man. Moreno waved it away.

"We will have cigarettes, if you please," he said, in a low voice. "Very keen eyes are watching us here. If you dangle that case much longer, they will put you down as a rich English milord. We may have to meet here often, and we want to avoid that. You see, I pose as a humble and unprosperous working-man."

Rossett bowed to his companion's superior judgment. Moreno knew the ropes better than he did. Cigarettes were called for, and then the Spaniard opened the ball. He spoke in French, in very low tones.

"Your friends did not do you a very good service in sending you here, Mr Rossett. At the present moment, yours is a very dangerous post."

Rossett did not reply without reflecting. He knew enough of this man to know that he was a trusted member of the Secret Service. But he was intelligent enough to know that, in spite of

certain walks in life, nobody can be entirely trusted.

“Do you mind explaining a little more fully,” he said cautiously.

Moreno smiled pleasantly. He appreciated the other’s caution. Rossett had a frank, open countenance, but he was not so innocent as he looked.

“My dear sir, I will lay my cards on the table with pleasure. I know a good deal about the Foreign Office and its ways. Greatorrex sent you over here because you happen to have come into possession of a good deal of useful information about the anarchist business in this country. Am I right?” Guy nodded. “So far, you are right.”

It was a long time before Moreno spoke again. He wanted to touch upon a delicate question, and he was not sure how far he might venture. If he said what he wanted to say, he was making use of the private information that was given him by Maurice Farquhar. Of course, Moreno, with his swift intuition, had arrived at the conclusion that family influence had been at the back of Rossett’s promotion, for certain private reasons.

“I take it also that your father, Lord Saxham, had something to do with this appointment.” Rossett flushed, and spoke haughtily. He thought this cosmopolitan was presuming.

“I am not aware that my father had anything to do with the matter.”

Moreno assented blandly. “Perhaps, but excuse me for saying that your family might desire to remove you from the society of a

certain very charming young lady, in whose company I saw you that night at the Savoy.”

“What do you know, or guess?” asked Rossett angrily.

“Please, Mr Rossett, do not be irate with me. Believe me I am your friend and well-wisher. I cannot tell you as much as I would wish, for, in the double rôle I am playing, I have to be very cautious.”

“Please go on,” said Rossett, a little mollified by the evident sincerity of his companion.

“For certain reasons which I am not at liberty to divulge, I take an interest in the young lady, who, I am sure, is devoted to you, and to whom I am sure you are equally devoted. I should also be pleased to be of service to yourself. You know that I am a member of the Secret Service, and that I regard every Englishman as under my care.”

“Yes, I know that,” assented Rossett a little grudgingly. Like his chief, Mr Stonehenge, he had a rooted distrust of all foreign nations. Was this man playing a double game? Anyway, he seemed to be remarkably well informed.

“I suppose you would think it impertinent if I proffered you some very good advice?” was the Spaniard’s startling question.

Rossett stared at him. Andres Moreno was most certainly a very extraordinary person. And yet there was a certain fascination about the man which enabled him to take extraordinary liberties.

“I will tell you when you have offered it,” answered the young

diplomat curtly.

A greasy-looking waiter came up and hovered about the table. Evidently he was wanting to listen to the conversation. Moreno waved him angrily away, speaking in Spanish.

“One of the gang,” he whispered to Rossett. “The city is honeycombed with them. Perhaps he understands French; we will speak English.”

He paused a moment before he spoke again.

“My advice to you is to clear out of this as quickly as you can, on some pretext or another. Write a private note to Greatorex to recall you; mention my name, he knows me well. Tell your father to pretend to be ill, and get leave of absence to go to his bedside. You understand.”

“Why should I do this?” queried Guy sharply. Moreno looked at him steadily. “Go home as I advise you, and marry the girl you love. Stay here, and this country, fair as it looks to outward seeming, is likely to provide you with a grave.”

For a second, Rossett’s face blanched. He was young, and death seemed far distant. The ominous words of his companion had brought it very near.

“Why, why?” he stammered. His glance sought the sinister figure of the eavesdropping waiter hovering in the background.

Moreno looked in the same direction. “You see that scoundrel yonder, whom I chased away just now. He carries a knife always with him; so do hundreds of his fellow ruffians. You are in the black books of the brotherhood. There are several looking out

for an opportunity to put you out of the way, because you know too much of them and their doings. Take my advice, and clear out. If you stop here, you have only a dog's chance."

Rossett spoke slowly and distinctly, the sturdy bulldog breed asserting itself. "I am sure you mean well. But do you think I would run away before this cowardly pack? Let them do their worst."

"Think of the girl you love," pleaded Moreno pensively. He thought the young man was a bit of a fool, but he could not help admiring him.

A spasm of pain crossed Rossett's face. On the one hand, home and love, Isobel Clandon for his wife. On the other, flight before the dagger of the anarchist assassin. Was there any doubt as to the choice, to a man of his breed?

"I will stay," he said doggedly. "And, if I put the issue to her, Isobel would say the same. I will stay, and, with your help, I will win through to safety."

Moreno at this juncture could not help swaggering a little. "You have the best brains of the Secret Service at your disposal," he said, "but you are a heavy charge, Mr Rossett. I should be much happier if you were back in England."

"I go back in honour, not as a fugitive," answered Guy quietly, as the two men walked together out of the restaurant.

"If that man had known who you were," observed Moreno, as they passed the waiter, "he would have slipped the knife into your ribs. Adieu, my friend. As you have chosen to stay here, we

shall meet often. I shall let you know how things are going on.”

And then, as they were parting, Rossett suddenly arrested him with a question.

“But, I say, how do you justify your existence here? What does Fleet Street say to your absence?”

Moreno smiled his subtle smile. “My dear friend, I am sending weekly articles up to Fleet Street on this delightful country, and its equally delightful population. In short, I am ‘booming’ Spain. I am the innocent journalist, out on a much needed holiday.”

Rossett smiled. “You are a very wonderful man. *Au revoir.*”

That night three letters were written to London. One was from Guy addressed to his sister, and it contained the important question, had his father anything to do with his appointment to Madrid; in other words, did he owe his promotion to anything except his own merits?

Mary’s reply came back in due course. It was distinctly conciliatory and diplomatic. But, as Mary was not very adapt at telling a lie, the truth peeped through. It was evident to Guy that Lord Saxham had exercised his influence to get his son to Spain, with the view of separating him from Isobel; Guy felt very bitter towards his father. He felt it was something in the nature of a dirty trick, diplomatic perhaps, but none the less of a questionable nature.

Moreno wrote two letters. The first was to Lady Mary Rossett. He had not even been introduced to that charming young woman, but such an elementary fact as that did not deter him. He

explained who he was, he recalled the evening at the Savoy. He pointed out that her brother was in great danger, and that she should use all the influence of her family to get Guy recalled on some pretext or another. He added that he had met Guy in Madrid and urged this course upon him, that Guy on scenting danger, with the stubborn pride of the Englishman, had refused to abandon his post.

The second letter he sent to the head of the English Secret Service with a request that it should be shown to Greatorex. The motive of the second letter was the same as the first, that Guy Rossett should be got out of harm's way, before an anarchist knife should be dug in his ribs.

Mary took the letter to her father. She was very genuinely alarmed; she also had a faint recollection of the swarthy young Spaniard who had sat at an adjoining table on that well-remembered evening at the Savoy. He had mentioned in his letter that he was a member of the Secret Service. She was disposed to trust him.

She thrust the letter into Lord Saxham's hand with an almost tragic gesture.

"Now, father, you can see what you have done by sending him over to Spain. That wily old Greatorex wanted to use him just for his own purpose, and you fell in pat with his scheme."

Lord Saxham read the letter, and his face blanched. "Oh, my poor boy," he groaned.

His daughter loved him, but at the bottom of her heart there

was always a little good-humoured contempt. He was so terribly weak. Headstrong, violent, and explosive, but always weak.

Lady Mary spoke irritably; she was tender and compassionate, but not in the least weak.

“We have got to act, father, and act immediately. Guy must come back at once. You must see this artful old Greatorex to-morrow.”

Saxham promised that he would see Greatorex to-morrow. He 'phoned up that important personage, and fixed an appointment.

The two men met. By that time Greatorex had received Moreno's letter from the head of the Secret Service. He knew, therefore, exactly what his old friend Lord Saxham had come about.

The Earl began in his usual explosive manner. “By God, Greatorex, you haven't treated me well in this matter. You have sent my poor boy to his death.”

If Lord Saxham had been a less important member of the aristocracy, the imperturbable Greatorex would have shown him the door. But under the circumstances forbearance had to be exercised.

“Softly, softly, if you please, my dear Saxham. It was at your request I sent your son to Spain, to get him out of an unfortunate entanglement.”

“I know, I know,” spluttered the Earl, never very great in argument, “but I didn't know he was going to his death.”

“No, more did I,” replied Greatorex, speaking with his usual

calm. "Now let us be reasonable and avoid indulging in mutual recriminations which irritate both parties. What do you want me to do?"

"Recall him at once," thundered Lord Saxham.

"One moment, if you please," said Greatorex quietly. "We have got to consider Guy's views on this matter. I have here a confidential communication from a very trusted member of our Secret Service. He has warned Guy of his danger, put all the possibilities and probabilities before him, and Guy refuses to budge. In short, he declines to run away. What have you got to say to that?"

"Then I say he is a most infernal fool," cried Lord Saxham in his most explosive manner. Greatorex's lip curled a little.

"Perhaps from your point of view. Shall I give you mine?"

"If you like," said Saxham sullenly. He was not so dense that he could not see what was in the other man's mind.

"He is a very brave young Englishman of the true bulldog breed, who is going to stick to his post oblivious of the consequences. It is that breed that makes the British Empire what it is. Do you still want me to recall him?"

"Yes," spluttered the Earl. "I want him recalled. I don't intend him to be done to death by a dirty Spanish anarchist."

Greatorex's look was very disdainful.

"I will be on the wires all day with Stonehenge and Guy. If he consents to be recalled on any pretext, I will recall him. But please understand me, Saxham; he shall only be recalled with his

own consent. I will go no further.”

The tall, lean man stood up, and towered over the somewhat blustering Lord Saxham.

“You can recall him, whether he consents or not,” cried the angry father, “if you choose.”

“In this case I am not going to exercise my prerogative. It is no use arguing, Saxham. On this point my mind is made up. I will only add that I greatly admire your son’s attitude. If he sticks to this business, he will have a great career before him.”

“Unless he is murdered to-morrow,” commented Saxham bitterly, as he walked out of the room.

The poor old Earl went back to Ticehurst Park in a very agitated frame of mind. Lady Mary was his favourite child, but Guy was his best beloved son. Ticehurst would inherit the lands and the title, but for Ticehurst he had only a very mild liking.

Mary met him in the hall. She was only a little less perturbed than her father.

“What news?” she cried eagerly. “Have you induced Greatorex to recall him?”

Lord Saxham had to confess to failure. He went with her into the morning-room, and related at full length the details of his interview with Greatorex. That powerful personage was ready to fall in with his views – but the stumbling-block was Guy himself. If Guy stuck to his resolution not to seek safety in flight, Greatorex would not move.

Mary’s sweet eyes filled with tears. She had already abused

Greatorex, but she was too just not to understand his attitude. At the bottom of his heart, Greatorex approved of Guy's resolution to stick to his post, whatever the consequences.

"I am sorry I said harsh things of Greatorex," she said in a broken voice. "Of course Guy himself could take no other course, and his chief admires his indomitable spirit. But, all the same, we must move heaven and earth to get him away."

The Earl sank wearily into a chair. Presently he began to cry and moan. "Oh, my poor boy. To think I have exposed him to this danger by my ill-advised action."

Poor Lady Mary was on the verge of hysteria herself, but the senile grief of the old Earl made her strong and self-reliant. Her brain was working quickly. Could she not turn this moment to advantage?

"You are sorry for what you have done, father? You recognise that, but for your unfortunate intervention, Guy would never have gone to Spain."

"I know, I know," replied poor old Lord Saxham in quavering accents. "I would cut off my right hand if, by doing so, I could undo that morning's work with Greatorex. I was very proud of it at the time."

Mary spoke very slowly, very calmly. "Guy has got in him the Rossett obstinacy, and, after all, he is only acting as a brave man should. We are less brave for him than he is for himself."

The Earl stretched out his shaking hands.

"Mary, will you write and implore him to let Greatorex recall

him. Greatorex has given me his promise to do so, if Guy consents.”

Mary shook her head. “Guy is very fond of me, I know. In many things I could influence him, but not in this. It is no use your writing to him, you have less influence over him than I. If he would not listen to me, he will not listen to you.”

“Then he is doomed.” The poor old Earl’s head sank on his breast, and he surrendered himself to despair.

And now had come Mary’s great opportunity, and she took advantage of it. She was no mean diplomatist at any time.

“I shall not move him, you will not move him. And you say you cannot move Greatorex. There is just one person in the world who might persuade him. I am not quite sure even about her.”

Lord Saxham was very subdued, very penitent, but there was still some of the old Adam left in him. He answered quickly; the voice was still quavering, but there was in it a querulous note.

“You mean that – ”

Lady Mary lifted a warning finger; she knew he was going to say “minx.”

“Father, please, this is no time for old and foolish animosities. Guy’s life is at stake, through his noble, perhaps exaggerated, sense of honour. You and I are powerless to alter his determination. There is just a chance that Isobel will be more successful. Will you put your pride in your pocket and ask her to plead with him?”

It was a hard struggle, but in the end Lord Saxham’s affection

for his son won. The old aristocrat gave in.

“Do what you like, Mary. I will consent to anything to get Guy back.”

Mary moved swiftly to the writing-table. “I shall ask her and her father to come to us to-morrow for a visit with the view of your sanctioning her engagement to Guy. I shall ask her to wire their acceptance.”

The Earl sat as in a dream, while she wrote; dimly he realised that events had taken a turn which he could not approve. But there was no other course left. Mary’s letter was brief.

“My Dearest Isobel, – My father has consented to approve your engagement to Guy. We shall both be delighted if you and General Clandon will pay us a visit. Please come to-morrow, if possible. In that case, send me a wire on receipt of this note.

“Yours affectionately,

“Mary Rossett.”

Isobel received that letter next morning. She carried it to her father with shining eyes.

The General read it, and kissed her.

“Good news, indeed, my dear little girl. Lady Mary seems a witch, and able to work miracles.”

“Oh, isn’t she a darling?” cried Isobel enthusiastically. “Shall I send the wire at once?” The wire was sent. Poor Isobel was a little distressed about the scantiness of her wardrobe. But she took heart of grace when she reflected that this was sure to be quite a private visit. It was not likely there would be other guests

on such an especially family occasion.

Lady Mary met them at the station. She kissed Isobel affectionately, and shook the General, who looked very aristocratic and dignified, warmly by the hand.

“How did you manage it, you darling?” whispered Isobel as they sat together in the car.

“Circumstances went in my favour; it is not quite entirely due to my own diplomacy,” answered Mary a little shyly. She knew that, in a way, she had struck a bargain with her aristocratic and obstinate old father, the chance of saving Guy against his indomitable pride.

And she knew also that Isobel’s faithful heart would be very wounded when she learned the fact of her sweetheart’s peril.

“You will know all about it after dinner to-night,” she added evasively. “You must rein in your impatience till then.”

Isobel smiled happily. The world was rose-coloured to-day. Was not the last obstacle to her happiness removed? Would not her beloved Guy marry her in the sight of the whole world? His world as well as her own?

Lord Saxham was awaiting them in the big hall, having now fully reconciled himself to the situation. He had many faults; he was choleric, obstinate, and a good deal of an opportunist. But whatever line of action he took, even if he somewhat stultified himself in the process, he always bore himself with a certain dignity.

His meeting with the Clandons was expressive of his methods.

He held out his right hand cordially to the General. With his left he drew Isobel towards him, and printed a fatherly kiss upon her forehead.

“Welcome to Ticehurst, my dear child, which henceforth you must look upon as a second home. If Guy were here to-day our happiness would be complete.”

The warm-hearted Isobel was ready to burst into tears. The Earl was behaving like a gentleman; she forgave him his former obduracy. After all, was it not natural that he should wish Guy to marry a woman in his own world?

They had a very elaborate dinner, to which the host and the General did full justice. Isobel was too happy to care about food. Lady Mary ate just enough to keep her alive, according to her usual custom.

After dinner they went into one of the small drawing-rooms. Here Lord Saxham, in very happy phrases, expressed his cordial consent to the engagement between Guy and Isobel. The men shook hands, the two girls kissed each other. It was a charming family scene.

And then, in a manner, the real business of the evening began. Lady Mary began to explain things in a low and hesitating voice, that often faltered.

She felt just a little ashamed of her task. Isobel was quite innocent, but she was not without brains. The General, she was sure, was quite keen. When she finished her recital, she knew both father and daughter would attribute the Earl's sudden

conversion to its proper cause.

But Mary had not quite finished, when the Earl broke in, in his usual impetuous way.

“You see, Isobel,” – he had by now taken quite wholeheartedly to the idea of her as his daughter-in-law – “we must have Guy back as quickly as possible. At the present moment, you are the person who has the greatest influence over him. No doubt, at a word from you he will come.”

Isobel indulged in a rather forced smile; it struck Mary that there was something a little enigmatic in that smile. Of course, Lord Saxham had blundered as usual, he had revealed the truth just a little too nakedly. Isobel was reckoning up her welcome at its true value, so far as her host was concerned.

This, of course, Isobel did, so did her father. But she was too sensible a girl to be offended. She, was, perhaps, a little disappointed that she did not owe this swift change of policy to her true friend. Lady Mary.

She thought a little before she spoke. “Are you quite sure that Guy would come back, if I implored him to do so,” she said at length.

She turned towards Lord Saxham with a pleasant smile that robbed her words of any subtle impertinence.

“Guy has always told me that there is a strong vein of obstinacy in the Rossett family. Perhaps,” – and here a proud light came into her eyes – “I could influence him more than anybody else in the world.”

Mary looked imploringly at her.

“And, Isobel, you will use that influence of course?”

“I will tell you something that, up to the present, I have only told my father,” replied the girl quietly. “I knew of all this some little time ago. My cousin, Maurice Farquhar, has a great friend, half Spanish, half English, who is also a journalist. He told my cousin that danger was threatening Guy. Maurice told me. You can guess what I felt. Guy is as dear to me as he is to you.”

“Of course, there is no need to tell us that,” cried Lady Mary hastily.

“My first impulse was to write to Guy, tell him what I had heard, and implore him to leave this dangerous country. I consulted my father. I did not write that letter. Many a night I have lain awake, and in the morning resolved to write it. It is still unwritten.”

The Earl’s face bore a puzzled expression. Lady Mary seemed somewhat bewildered too. General Clandon alone displayed no emotion.

“I don’t understand,” breathed Mary softly.

“Oh, can’t you see?” cried Isobel quickly. “Suppose Guy yielded to my prayers, and seized some excuse to come back! Might he not in after years reproach me for having induced him to play a coward’s part? Surely you can understand what I feel.”

And, in one swift moment of comprehension, the worldly and opportunist Earl and his far nobler daughter understood.

Lady Mary looked at her father with a triumphant smile. She

had gauged Isobel aright from the first.

Gone for ever the dishonouring suspicions of a designing young woman seeking to make her fortune by a wealthy marriage. It was all too obvious. With Guy's departure from Spain, Isobel had everything to gain. With his sojourn in that dangerous country she stood to lose everything.

"Whether I marry Guy or not," went on the low, sweet voice, breaking at the end into a little sob, "his honour is my first consideration."

The General's deep tones broke the intense silence that succeeded those few words.

"Lord Saxham, Lady Mary, I most heartily approve Isobel's attitude. I am sure Mr Rossett feels as I do in this matter. If he deserted his post at this juncture, he would be like the soldier who runs away on the battlefield."

Lord Saxham looked at the beautiful, slender girl, so noble in her self-sacrificing love.

"My dear," he said, in tones that were a little unsteady, "you are a wonderful woman. Guy could not have chosen more wisely. I am sorry – very sorry – " He broke off. It was not perhaps precisely the moment to apologise for his previous obstinacy, his rancour against "the little girl who lived in a cottage at Eastbourne."

Lady Mary went round the table, put her arms round her, and kissed her warmly.

"You are a brave and beautiful darling," she said, with a

woman's enthusiasm. "You have taught both my father and myself a lesson in unselfishness. God grant that our dear Guy comes back to us safe and sound."

Chapter Eight

A tall, lean man of about sixty years of age, of dignified appearance, came out of a house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead, and walked slowly in the direction of the station at Swiss Cottage.

He was a very aristocratic-looking person; you might have taken him for a retired ambassador, except for the fact that retired ambassadors do not live in the neighbourhood of Finchley Road. At the first glance you might have thought he was an Englishman, with his clear complexion, his short, pointed beard. A closer inspection revealed the distinguishing traits of the foreigner. But even then you would have been inclined to put him down as a Frenchman, rather than a Spaniard.

Ferdinand Contraras, such was his name, was one of the principal leaders of the world-wide anarchist movement. A man of learning and education, he had worked it out to his own satisfaction that anarchy was the cure for all social evils. A man of considerable wealth, he had devoted the greater portion of his possessions to the spreading of this particular propaganda. His zeal in the great cause burnt him with a consuming fire.

One is confronted with these anomalies in all countries – men of family and refinement, reaching out sincere hands to the proletariat, and welcoming them into a common brotherhood.

Mirabeau led the French Revolution in its first steps, an

aristocrat of the first water. Tolstoi, equally an aristocrat, preached very subversive doctrines.

Ferdinand Contraras, from conviction, sentimentality, or some other equally compelling motives, hated his own order, and devoted himself heart and soul to the service of the masses as against the classes. He had spent much more than half his very considerable fortune on the necessary propaganda of his principles. From the house in Fitzjohn's Avenue he, in conjunction with a few other enthusiastic spirits, controlled the policy which was directed to upset an old and effete world and construct a new and perfect one on the ruins of the old.

He waited outside the station for quite five minutes, tapping his stick impatiently the while. He was, by temperament, a very impatient and autocratic person, like most people who aspire to sovereign power.

The burly and imposing figure of Luçue appeared through the gloom of the station. The two men shook hands. Contraras grumbled a little.

"My friend, punctuality was never your very special virtue. You were to be at my house by a quarter-past six. It is now a quarter to seven, half an hour late, and I am meeting you at the station. It would take another five minutes to get to my house."

"That would mean I should be quite thirty-five minutes late, eh?" queried Luçue in his usual easy, genial fashion. He had the greatest respect for the great leader, Ferdinand Contraras; he fully recognised his single-mindedness, his devotion to the cause.

But he was also aware of his little weaknesses of temper, his proneness to take offence at trifles. "I am honestly very sorry I have kept you waiting, but it was impossible to get away before."

Luçue surveyed the neighbourhood around him with some contempt, and added: "Besides, if you will live in an out-of-the-way spot like this, you can't blame your friends if they find it a bit difficult to get to you."

Luçue himself lived in lodgings in a mean street in Soho. In spite of his reverence for his chief, he did not quite relish the fact that Contraras was living in a lordly pleasure house, that he fared every day on the daintiest food, and was very particular as to vintages. Contraras, in spite of his sacrifices to the great cause, was not exactly practising what he preached.

Luçue himself was poor. Hence, perhaps, these profound meditations. It would not be going too far to say that Luçue was already anticipating the day when Contraras would be required, under the new dispensation, to hand over the remainder of his wealth for the common benefit.

But things had not got so far as this at the moment. Law and order were still in the ascendant, and anarchy had not yet got its foot into the stirrup, much less was it mounted in the saddle.

The two men walked up to the house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, where Contraras lived in some sort of state. A butler opened the door, a footman hovered in the background. There would be a dinner of many courses, there would be wines of the first quality. For the leader of the great anarchist movement did himself and

his friends very well. Poor Contraras! He often failed to notice the envious eyes of his friends, the humble friends who left his hospitable house to return to their dingy lodgings in Soho, or the mean streets off Tottenham Court Road.

He took Luçue into his private sitting-room. A decanter of whiskey, soda-water, and glasses were ready on the table, placed there by the thoughtful butler. In the best of all possible worlds there would be no butlers thought Luçue grimly, as he helped himself at his host's invitation.

"What of Guy Rossett?" asked Contraras abruptly, when the two men were seated. "He knows a great deal. He knows too much."

"My section is dealing with his affair," replied Luçue smoothly. "Violet Hargrave and Andres Moreno are over in Spain, as of course you know."

Contraras grunted. He was not in a very good mood to-night; he had not yet forgiven Luçue for his lack of punctuality.

"Violet Hargrave I know, of course, a friend and protégée of our staunch old comrade Jaques. Moreno I know nothing about. Who is he, what is he?"

Luçue explained. Moreno was a journalist, his father pure Spanish, his mother an Englishwoman. His principles were sound. He was a revolutionary heart and soul.

Contraras was still in the grunting stage. He helped himself to another whiskey.

"You are a judge of men, Luçue; you seldom make mistakes,"

he said, in rather a grudging voice.

“I don’t quite like the idea of the English mother. You have thought that all out?”

“Quite,” was the swift reply. “Moreno comes to us with settled convictions. He is, like yourself, a philosophical anarchist.”

It certainly said a good deal for Moreno’s powers of persuasion that he had succeeded in convincing the suspicious Luçue of his sincerity.

The gong sounded for dinner. Contraras kept to his gentlemanly habits; his house was ordered in orthodox fashion. His wife, a faded-looking woman, who had once been a beauty, sat at the head of the table. His daughter, a comely, dark-eyed girl, his only child, faced the guest. Neither wife nor daughter had the slightest sympathy with the peculiar views of the head of the household. As a matter of fact, they thought he was just a trifle insane on this one particular point.

They detested the strange-looking men, some of them in very shabby raiment, who came to this well-appointed house in Fitzjohn’s Avenue, to partake of their chief’s hospitality and drink his choice wines. They marvelled between themselves at the blindness of Contraras. Could he not see that these shabby creatures hated him for his wealth, for the hospitality which they regarded as a form of ostentation?

Several times both mother and daughter had tried to point this out to him.

“Live in a little forty-pound-a-year house, without a maid,

with Inez and me to scrub and cook, and they might believe in you," his wife had remarked bitterly on one occasion when her nerves had been more than usually upset by the intrusion of some very shabby looking guests. "Of course, now they reckon you up at your true value. You are making the best of the present order of things, getting the best you can out of it. Bah! What do you expect if your dreams come to pass? They will not leave you a sixpence, these wretches whom you have put into power. They will strip you at once."

The visionary had smiled condescendingly. He had a poor opinion of the mental capacity of women. They had no initiative, no foresight.

But he was very tolerant to the weaker vessel. He patted the faded cheek of his once beautiful wife, a daughter of the old Spanish nobility. He was a kind husband, a fond father.

"You do not understand these difficult matters, my dear," he replied in his loftiest tones. "The world will always be governed by brains, whether under a just or an unjust régime." He tapped his broad forehead significantly. "When it comes to brains, Ferdinand Contraras will not be found wanting."

Madame shrugged her shoulders and glanced at her pretty daughter, who made a signal of assent. Certainly, Contraras, great as was his power in anarchist circles, was not held in high esteem in his own family.

Towards Luçue the two women did not exhibit the same signs of aversion which they usually displayed to the other guests.

The reason was obvious. He was a self-seeking, grasping fellow. He loved the flesh-pots, the good things of life. If he got into power with his chief, they would take the best for themselves and let their poor dupes feed on the husks. The difference between the two men was that Contraras was troubled with an almost ridiculous sentimentality. Luçue, big, genial, and humorous, was as callous as any human being could be. And he, moreover, had no conscience.

The meal was finished. Although in a way Luçue despised his chief's ostentatious mode of living, he was very fond of good wine and food. There might come a time when, through Contraras' brains, he would be in a similar position. The two men adjourned to the private sitting-room, where the great man produced some special brandy and choice cigars.

"Drink, my friend," said the host genially. "We shall think none the less wisely because we take an excellent glass of brandy and smoke an equally excellent cigar."

Luçue assented, but after a brief pause he spoke a little bluntly.

"You will not think I am taking a liberty, my good comrade, if I say a few words to you. We have a difficult team to drive. Many of our brotherhood, most, alas, are very poor. Exception is taken by some of them to your mode of living. They think the great Contraras should bring himself more on a level with his less fortunate brethren."

Contraras frowned. By nature he was more autocratic than the most despotic monarch who even subjugated a docile people. But

he recognised that Luçue's words conveyed a warning.

“What would they have? My wife has said the same thing to me, and at the time I fancied it was the foolish babbling of a woman. Now I see that there was some wisdom in her remarks.”

“Equality is our watchword,” observed Luçue with a rather subtle smile.

“Of course,” agreed Contraras smoothly. “That is our aim, our goal. But, under present conditions, we cannot practise it. I have, as you know, given the greater portion of my money to the cause. I have proved my sincerity. You will say I have left some for myself. True, but that is a wise policy. I live here in a certain sort of comfort. The position I keep up helps me to remain unsuspected. Nobody will think I am such a fool as to embrace anarchy. With these trappings, I can work better for the cause than if I hid myself in a back street in Soho.”

Luçue agreed. The chief had a long head. Luçue might envy, but he could not refrain from admiring him.

Contraras broke away from the embarrassing topic of inequality in fortune. He spoke brusquely.

“To return to this Englishman, Rossett. You think you can settle his hash?”

Luçue nodded his big head. “It is settled, as I told you. I am working in conjunction with Alvedero and Zorrilta.”

“No two better men, they are staunch to the core, true sons of Spain,” said Contraras approvingly. “One thing I would love to know, Luçue. Who supplied Rossett with his information?”

“That I am also keen to know. There are always traitors in every camp. Perhaps some day I may find out.”

The two men talked till it was time for Luçue to catch his train. Contraras walked with him to the station.

The chief wrung him by the hand. “If you ever find that traitor, no half measures, you understand.”

Luçue smiled a grim smile. “You can never accuse me of sentimentality. The penalty for every traitor is death.”

Chapter Nine

It had been a very hot August day. The old-world town of Fonterrabia had glowed in the torrid heat. With the sinking of the sun had come a sudden breath of comparative coolness.

In a small room facing the sea, in the obscure little café “The Concho” there sat four people. They were respectively, Zorrilta, Jaime Alvedero, two of the most trusted lieutenants of the great Contraras – Contraras who directed his world-wide campaign from the safe and sheltered precincts of Fitzjohn’s Avenue, Hampstead – Andres Moreno, journalist, trusted agent of the English Secret Service, ostensibly sworn anarchist, and lastly Violet Hargrave, now domiciled in Spain in the interests of the brotherhood, in England a somewhat well-known member of the semi-smart set.

Moreno, as we know, was the son of a purely Spanish father and an English mother. Violet Hargrave was not greatly given to confidences. But the pair had been thrown much together. In spite of their mixed nationality, Spain was, to a great extent, a foreign land to them.

Violet had been born in Spain and lived there up to the age of ten, but her memories of the country were faint and fragmentary. Moreno had been born in England, brought up and educated there. He spoke Spanish perfectly since his father had taught him the language, and conversed in it with him from childhood. In

that father's company he had made some dozen trips to what was really his native country, he had visited every important town – Barcelona, Toledo, Seville, Granada, Segovia, not to mention Madrid.

Still, they were both more English than foreign, and there was an unconscious sympathy between them arising from this fact. Moreno's heart ached for the familiar haunts of Fleet Street, for the restaurants where the odour of garlic was not always greatly in evidence. And Violet sighed for the elegant flat in Mount Street, with its perfect appointments. She had grown to loathe this sun-baked Biscayan coast.

Being thrown so much in each other's society, caution had been a little relaxed on the woman's side – Moreno had never for a moment relaxed his. Violet Hargrave was still an enigma to him. He was not prepared to trust her in the smallest degree. But in his peculiar position he could trust nobody.

One day she had been very confidential. It had been after a good dinner, followed by one or two potent liqueurs. On such an occasion even the most cautious woman of the world may find her tongue loosened.

She had confided to Moreno a considerable portion of her family history. Her father, a ne'er-do-well, a soldier of fortune – she frankly gave this description of her male parent – had fallen in love with and married her Spanish mother, a beautiful young girl, a professional dancer, not, however, occupying a *Very* high position in her profession.

It peeped through the narrative, told in a rather staccato fashion, that her father had lived chiefly on his wife's small earnings, that he did no regular work, but acted as her agent. When she was ten years of age, her mother died, and her father was thrown on his own resources.

They had come to London. James Wheeler, such was her father's name, had at once sought out a rich financier known in business circles as Mr Jackson. His real name was Juan Jaques, he was a Spaniard, and he had at one time been desperately in love with her mother.

For the sake of that old affection, he had befriended the derelict father and the helpless child. He had set Wheeler on his legs, so far as it was possible to help such a weak and incapable creature. But Wheeler was addicted to drink and was cursed with a feeble constitution. In a few years, the drink carried him off. Violet, at the age of eighteen, was left alone in the world. Her mother, no doubt, had relatives in Spain, but she knew nothing of them. Of her father's relations, if he had any, she had never heard him speak.

Whatever the failings of the moneylender in certain directions, he behaved with rare generosity and tenderness to the daughter of his old sweetheart. He advanced money to secure her a good education. He did his best to secure for her eligible posts.

Still, on the whole, she had experienced a rough time. She could do a little of everything fairly, but nothing very well. She had tried the concert hall, the stage, and been a failure on both.

She had not even inherited her mother's talent for dancing.

But poor old Jaques was always patient and kind. He kept her going with an allowance that might be called handsome. At the back of his mind he felt pretty sure that Violet would prove a winner in the end.

She had been very seedy. Jaques had summoned her to his private room, thrust a hundred pounds worth of notes into her hand, and ordered her to take herself off to the most expensive hotel in Scarborough, to pick up health and strength. They would map out together some fresh plan of campaign when she came back.

At the expensive hotel in Scarborough, she met Jack Hargrave, a personable young fellow, who seemed to have plenty of money, and was of good family.

At that time Violet was a very thrifty young woman – she learned expensive habits later on – she reckoned that she would stay at Scarborough for a fortnight, and return with a handsome balance out of the hundred pounds. Then the kind Jaques, to whom she was genuinely grateful, would not have to put his hand in his pocket for some little time.

She met Jack Hargrave, who was staying at the same hotel. He fell violently in love with her, with her blonde prettiness. At the end of the first week he proposed.

Violet was attracted by him, perhaps a little bit in love. She accepted him on the spot, and went off the next morning to London to consult Jaques, in whom she placed her full

confidence.

There was here a little break in the story, as told to Moreno. Evidently her guardian approved. She married Jack Hargrave, and they had taken the flat in Mount Street, of which she was still the tenant.

Here Moreno had interrupted. "You say that Jack Hargrave was well-off. How did he make his money? Flats in Mount Street are not run on credit."

"Oh, don't you know? It was Jaques who put him into good things in the City, out of friendship for me."

"But, one moment," pursued Moreno. "He was well-off when he met you. How was he making money when our good old friend Jaques had not appeared on the scene?"

Violet, under the influence of the liqueurs, was a little off her guard.

"Oh, don't be silly. Jack was a very expert bridge-player."

Moreno nodded. "I think I understand. We won't go into details. Under his instructions, you became a very expert bridge-player too. It used to be whispered that you were just a little bit too lucky."

Violet Hargrave admitted that many rumours had been flying about, and that the flat in Mount Street had become a little suspect.

"And how did you get into this?" had been Moreno's next question.

Violet had been very frank. "It was dear old Jaques who drew

me into it. You know I have told you how grateful I was to him, how indebted. When he asked me, could I refuse, after all the benefits he had showered upon me?"

"Impossible," said Moreno in his quiet, easy tones. He added, after a pause, "I wonder if your heart is in it?"

She flashed at him a swift glance of interrogation. "I wonder if yours is?"

Moreno smiled. They were then each suspecting the other, on account of their mixed parentage.

"Absolutely," he answered in a tone of deep conviction. "I am nine-tenths Spaniard, one-tenth Englishman. You are one-tenth Spaniard and nine-tenths Englishwoman. I very much doubt if your heart is in it."

Violet spoke in a low, hard voice. And she also felt there was need of caution.

"I have lived a very hard life, depending upon charity, generous charity I admit, for many years. I think I do not love the present order of things. I am really an anarchist; I think I may truly say my heart is in it."

Moreno accepted her statement. She was still an enigma to him. She had spoken of Jaques with a genuine sense of gratitude, she had alluded to her late husband in terms of sincere affection. The woman had her sentimental moments.

Then he remembered that she was the daughter of a drunken and derelict father – this much she had told him. Her mother was a Spanish dancer of unknown origin. Out of this peculiar blend,

was it possible to fashion an honest woman. Moreno doubted it.

He remembered the night in the flat at Mount Street, when she had vindictively declared that Guy Rossett had to be got out of the way.

He had looked at the still very pretty woman, her fair cheeks just a little flushed with the after results of the good dinner. She had, perhaps, her good points, but was she not an absolute degenerate? Daughter of the wastrel father and the Spanish dancer!

He had been very sympathetic through the recital. He had helped her on with an encouraging word or two in the pauses of her narrative, for at times she had evidently pulled herself up with the recollection that she was being too frank. But he had learned a good deal about Violet's past.

He still had his suspicions. Perhaps another dinner or two might get more out of her.

The four conspirators sat in the little room facing the sea. Violet Hargrave, by the way, was dressed in a peasant costume.

Alvedero spoke in his deep voice. "I think, for the present, we will make Fonterrabia our headquarters. It is a quiet little town, and, for the moment, not suspect."

The Deputy-Governor of Navarre assented. They could do great things from this comparatively obscure quarter.

Alvedero spoke again. "Now, first, there is the question of Guy Rossett. Contraras and Luçue are agreed that he should be removed speedily."

Moreno hastened to corroborate. He knew that Violet Hargrave was watching him narrowly. "The sooner the better," he said heartily. "He knows too much."

"A great deal too much!" burst in Zorrilta angrily. "The question is, where did he get his information from? Some traitor, of course." Moreno glanced at Violet Hargrave. He had his suspicions of her, but not a muscle of her countenance moved. His suspicions of her then were not confirmed. But Violet said nothing in reply to Zorrilta's angry outburst.

There came a diversion. Father Gonzalo passed the window of the small sitting-room. His hawklike eye peered through the window.

"*Dios!*" cried Zorrilta, jumping up. "That accursed priest again! He roves about here like an evil spirit."

"Who is he, this priest?" cried Moreno eagerly. He had seen the lean figure of the father passing the window, and had noted the keen, inquisitive glance.

Zorrilta explained what he had learned from the intelligent fisherman Somoza. Father Gonzalo was a Jesuit, not attached to the Church of Santa Gadea. He was suspected of being a spy in the pay of the Government.

Moreno rose. "Shall I go and sample this gentleman?" he said. "I can play the rôle of the devout Catholic very well."

Zorrilta and Alvedero grinned. They were both nominal Catholics, but their religion did not trouble them very much. They were pleased with the enterprising spirit of their new

recruit.

“Go my friend, come back and report to us.” Moreno, well pleased, strode out, and soon overtook the priest, who was walking leisurely.

“Good evening, Father,” he said pleasantly. He also added a few Spanish words which were a password.

When he heard those magic words, the priest’s lean, ascetic face changed at once.

“You are one of us?” he asked briefly.

“Of course. My name is Moreno. I am attached to the English Secret Service, and I am helping your Government to beat the anarchists.”

“Good,” said Father Gonzalo. “Those people I saw you with in the little sitting-room at the ‘Concha,’ I know the two well, Zorrilita and Alvedero; the woman I do not know. I take it they are all anarchists. You are joining up with them for your own purposes.”

“Precisely,” answered Moreno. “Keep your eyes open too. This is, at present, the headquarters of the conspiracy.”

“My son, good night,” said the wily Jesuit in his most paternal tones. “We shall meet again. You have, of course, made a good excuse for leaving your friends, and running after me.”

Moreno smiled. “When I return I shall give the best report of you, a report that I trust will disarm suspicion. But it is as well to put you on your guard. You have a very keen enemy here, one Carlos Somoza, a fisherman. Conciliate him, if you can.” The

Jesuit's dark eyes flashed. "I know him. The dirty dog. I will be on my guard. I will go to Santa Gadea, and pray for my sins."

The unctuous priest stole away. Moreno watched his departure with a contemptuous smile. He did not seem a very valiant member of the church militant.

Moreno joined his companions. He addressed them in his usual easy fashion.

"Couldn't get much out of him. I should say he was quite a harmless old chap, full of good works. He seemed very concerned that I should be drinking at a place like the 'Concha.' He gave me some very good advice. I don't think he has brains enough to be a spy."

The other two men laughed. Moreno had carried the affair off so well that they believed him implicitly.

Then Alvedero spoke seriously.

"This affair of Guy Rossett was very pressing." He turned to Moreno and Violet Hargrave. "I daresay you know that Luçue has delegated this matter to me, as being on the spot."

The two members of this conclave of four bowed; they had gathered this much before they left England.

"Yesterday, however, I had instructions from our great leader, Contraras," pursued Alvedero; he uttered the name of his chief in accents of profound reverence. "The affair of Guy Rossett has, for the moment, sunk into comparative insignificance. There is bigger game afoot."

"Ah!" breathed Moreno eagerly. True to his histrionic instinct,

he was playing the rôle of enthusiast very well.

Violet Hargrave, who was never very enthusiastic, thought it well to imitate him, and leaned forward as if eager to catch the next words from the great man's lips.

Alvedero spoke slowly. "As you know, in difficult times, we have to proceed with great caution – I cannot divulge all that Contraras has entrusted me with to-day. To-morrow Valerie Delmonte will be over here! We will meet at the same place and the same hour."

He paused, and then lifted his hands to the low roof of the mean sitting-room in which the four were assembled.

"The brain of that man is stupendous, gigantic," he cried, in tones of the deepest admiration. "My friends, he has planned a great *coup*, and Valerie Delmonte is going to carry it out! She is devoted, she is fearless, she will not blench. To-morrow at this hour and this place I will take you into the secret; it is possible one of you may be called upon to assist."

A few minutes later the meeting broke up. There would be an exciting day to-morrow, thought Moreno, as he strolled away.

Chapter Ten

If Lord Saxham had been, in his heart, disappointed that he could not induce Isobel to cajole her lover away from his post, he was too much a gentleman to go back on his word. Besides, he recognised that in this instance the girl was right, and he wrong, that she had displayed a nobility of spirit which was lacking in himself and his daughter.

He had given his consent to the engagement without imposing conditions, and he could not in honour take that consent back. In addition, he could not but feel a whole-hearted admiration for a woman who could sacrifice her own feelings, not to mention her own interests, in such an unselfish fashion.

The immediate result of the brief visit to Ticehurst Park was the despatch of a paragraph to the various papers announcing the engagement of Mr Guy Rossett, second son of the Earl of Saxham, to Miss Clandon, daughter of General Clandon.

When father and daughter arrived at their modest home in Eastbourne, the news was public property. Letters of congratulation came by every post from the numerous friends and acquaintances whom they had made during their long sojourn in the town.

Isobel could now openly wear that beautiful ring which hitherto she had only dared to look upon in secret – that expensive ring which, as a matter of fact, had been purchased

from money supplied by the obliging Mr Jackson. For, at the actual moment when the General had given his consent to the engagement, Guy had been extremely hard up.

So now all was plain sailing. Isobel was very proud of her lover, naturally very delighted at her adoption into the Saxham family. But, as there is no happiness without alloy, the knowledge of that lover's danger weighed terribly upon her spirits, and caused her to shed many bitter tears.

Her little world which congratulated and fussed around her, of course, knew nothing of this. To the girls of her own age, girls moving in respectable but middle-class circles, who knew nothing of the aristocracy except through the fashionable papers, she was greatly to be envied.

There was one amongst the numerous letters of congratulations which had touched her very deeply. It was written by her cousin, Maurice Farquhar. It was couched in rather stiff, sometimes stilted phraseology, but sincerity was in every line. And, if Maurice was a bit priggish and old-fashioned, he was always a gentleman.

He had made no allusion to his own disappointed hopes. He had congratulated her heartily on her engagement, expressed his conviction that she would adorn any station to which she was called. And the letter had concluded with these words.

"I know the danger that is threatening your fiancé. Moreno has promised to let me know if I can help him. I do not fancy it will ever be in my power to render any valuable assistance; our paths

in life do not seem to meet anywhere. Still, if the time does come, I shall do my best, from my own cousinly affection for you.”

It was put frankly but gracefully. He did not care twopence for Guy Rossett. It was not to be expected that he would. But he would be a friend to Rossett, because he still loved Isobel. She laid down the letter with a little sigh. So short a time as two years ago, Maurice might have satisfied her maiden dreams, she was not quite sure. She was so wrapped in the present that she could hardly see the past in its proper proportions. Anyway, she could reckon on her cousin in the future as a true and loyal friend.

Her heart was very much with Guy in that dangerous post at Madrid, her thoughts ever. One night when the two were sitting alone in the General's cosy little den, a little cry escaped her.

“Somehow, I seem to hate Eastbourne! It is very ungrateful, considering how happy I have been here. But I do so long to be near Guy.”

The General was very moved by that pathetic cry. He stirred uneasily in his chair.

“Of course you wish it, my darling. I daresay Lady Mary wishes the same. But, if you were both there, neither of you could do him the least good, nor avert any danger that is threatening him.”

“Oh, I recognise that,” said Isobel, wiping the tears from her eyes. “It is the suspense that is so horrible. If one were near, one might know something of what is going on.”

The General thought for a moment or two before he spoke.

He had indulged every whim, forestalled every wish of his dear wife. He had done the same with his daughter since the day when he had found himself a widower, and they had been all in all to each other.

He smiled a little sadly. "I am afraid we old men become a sad burden on our dutiful children, exact too much from them," he said presently. "Lady Mary would love to be near Guy, and she cannot leave her father. And you, my poor little girl, are in the same plight."

Isobel laid her soft cheek against his. "Oh, Daddy, dearest Daddy, it is not very kind to say that. However great my love for Guy, it can never supersede my love for you."

The General patted her head fondly. "Ah, my dear, the curse of a small family; we have always been all too much to each other." Then he spoke briskly; he waited to make her happier than she was.

"I see no reason, though, why we could not go to Madrid together. We could do it by easy stages, and, by gad, Madrid would be a change. I am very fond of Eastbourne, but we have had a good bit of it. I think I will go and see our old Doctor Jones to-morrow."

But Isobel would not hear of it. Her father had suffered from heart affection in his youth. During the last five years it had become very acute. He must live a quiet, well-ordered life, avoid any undue exertion. His daughter had gathered from Dr Jones that the General's life held by a very frail thread. The summons

might come at any moment.

Nevertheless, General Clandon was round at the doctor's door by ten o'clock the next morning. He was bent upon falling in with Isobel's desire.

The doctor stared at him. He had always been summoned to the General's house; not half a dozen times had his patient come to him.

"What's up?" he inquired tersely. "The heart not troubling you more than usual, I hope?"

To look at General Clandon, as he stood in the surgery, a fine upstanding figure of a man, you would have said he was free from all human ailments. Nobody could have guessed that he carried in that stalwart frame the seeds of a mortal disease that, at any moment, might lay him low.

"No, no more than usual. But yes, I think the palpitations are a little more frequent the last week or two."

"Let me run the rule over you." Doctor Jones produced his stethoscope. "Why didn't you send for me before?"

"Just a moment, my good old friend, before you begin. Isobel particularly wants to go to Spain for reasons you can guess – her fiancé's there. I can't let her go without me, unless I could lay my hands upon a suitable chaperon. I want you to tell me if you will give me permission to go with her myself. I should take the journey in easy stages, of course."

There was a very wistful look in the old man's eyes as he uttered the last words; it seemed as if he were pleading for

permission to gratify his daughter's wish.

"Isobel, of course, won't hear of it, after what you have told me; she did not know I was coming here. But if you could give your sanction, it would make us both very happy," he added hastily, as he began to unbutton his coat.

Jones had been an army doctor, and he was very sympathetic. It was very pathetic, this poor old father with almost two feet in the grave, begging a little further respite from death.

"I will see what we can do, as soon as I have examined you," he said kindly. "If it is humanly possible for you to go, I will let you go, for Isobel's sake."

The examination was a searching and lengthy one. When it was finished, Doctor Jones laid down his stethoscope with a little sigh.

"My dear General, it is impossible. You are a brave man, you have faced death more than once on the battlefield, and you have always asked me to tell you the truth. If you undertake that voyage, you are committing suicide."

"You don't give me very long then?" asked the General quietly. The doctor shrugged his shoulders and turned his head away. He could not quite put it in words.

"You have had some extra excitement lately? Great inroads have been made since I last examined you."

"Yes," answered General Clandon quietly, "there has been a good deal of excitement lately."

It was true. The uncertain position of Isobel as regards her

engagement, the hurried visit to Ticehurst Park, the danger overhanging Guy Rossett had agitated him very much.

He returned home very crestfallen. He had hoped against hope for the doctor's favourable verdict. He had longed to be able to say to her: "It is all right, I will take you to Spain myself."

But in the face of those grave words it was impossible to say it. It would be no benefit to her to take her out, and die before they got to the end of the journey.

Isobel met him in the hall of their pretty little home, half villa, half cottage.

"Why, where in the world have you been?" she cried, "running away at this early hour of the morning?"

They lived such an intimate and domestic life, that it was almost a point of honour to give notice of each other's movements.

The General was a bad dissembler. He blurted it all out at once.

"To tell you the truth, I wanted to take you out to Spain. I went round to see Jones, to learn what he said about it. He forbids it."

She looked at him anxiously. Yes, he seemed to have aged even the last week. A spasm of reproach shot through her that she had not been quicker to notice his failing health. Guy had usurped her thoughts too much.

"But I don't think it will be difficult to arrange. I can soon get hold of some female dragon, some elderly chaperon who will take you."

The girl's eyes filled with tears. Not for the first time did she appreciate that unselfish parental love, the love that gives everything, and asks so little in return.

She kissed him very tenderly. "No, no, a thousand times no, you kindest of all kind fathers. Until you get well and strong again, I would not leave you for a thousand lovers."

He patted her hand. He was the most unselfish of men, but it pleased him very much to hear her say that much. The stranger who had come into her life was not going to oust the old father from his place in her heart.

"We have been so much to each other, little girl, since your dear mother died, have we not?" he asked gently.

"More than so much," she whispered back. "Oh, more than so much. We have been everything to each other." At that moment even her lover was almost forgotten. A few hours later, she stole out of the house, and called on the doctor.

"My father is worse," she said impetuously, when she entered the consulting-room.

Doctor Jones looked very grave. "My dear child, he is as bad as he can be. I have warned you before. The end may come at any moment."

"And yet it only seems yesterday that he was out shooting – of course I know it is months ago – and when he came back, I used to ask him if he was tired, and he always told me he never felt more fit in his life. And a big, strong man in appearance! A few weeks ago he did not look his age."

“It is frequently the way with this particular disease,” was the doctor’s reply. “They hang on for years, with a sort of spurious energy, and then, all of a sudden, they go – snap.”

“Will he suffer much, do you think?” asked Isobel, bravely keeping back the tears.

“Don’t trouble yourself about that. He will go out like the snuff of a candle. Take my word for it, he will not suffer.”

He accompanied her to the door; he had become very attached to the pair – the charming girl devoted to her father, the elderly man who worshipped his daughter.

“Keep a brave heart, my child. It may come to-night, to-morrow. He is worse than I thought.” And three days after that interview with the kindly doctor the end came.

The housemaid went into his room with his morning cup of tea. The poor old General was lying on his side, his face quite placid. But the girl knew that the pallor on it was the hue of death. She ran sobbing to Isobel’s room.

“Miss, miss! Come at once to the General.” Isobel guessed immediately what that summons meant. She sprang out of bed and went to her father’s room. One glance at the white, placid face confirmed her worst fears. She sent the frightened girl for the doctor. He came, and was able to ease her mind in one respect – her beloved father had died peacefully, without a struggle.

The charming little home which had sheltered her for so many years was a house of mourning. She thought tearfully of his loving kindness, of the many self-sacrifices he had made to give

her some small comfort, some little luxury. Even from a devoted husband, would she ever have such a disinterested love as that? – the love that gives all and asks nothing.

But she was a soldier's daughter, and she braced herself to go through the ordeal, the most trying of all ordeals to affectionate hearts, the removal of the beloved dead.

She first sent a wire to Maurice Farquhar, asking him to come to her. Then she sent another wire to the General's elder brother, the owner of the small family estates.

In two hours came back her cousin's answer.

“Am catching an early train.”

The Squire's answer came back about the same time. “Will be with you to-morrow morning.” And then she thought of a quite new, but very sincere friend. Lady Mary Rossett. She wired to her the sad news. To Guy she wrote a long letter. If she had sent him a wire, he might have rushed over, and neglected his duties. That would have rendered no service to the dead.

Lady Mary arrived first in her car – it was not a very long run from Ticehurst Park to Eastbourne. She explained that she had taken rooms at the “Queen's” for herself and her maid, and would see Isobel through this trying ordeal.

The two girls clung together. Mary said she would like to look upon the General for the last time. Isobel led her into the darkened chamber, and Mary imprinted a kiss upon the waxen brow.

“He was a most perfect gentleman,” she said. “You will always

be proud to remember that you were his daughter.”

“He was the dearest and the best. He was – ”

But Isobel could say no more, for fear she should break down.

A few moments after Mary’s arrival came Farquhar, lumbering up from the station in a somewhat antiquated taxi.

Isobel welcomed him warmly. “How good of you, Maurice, to come so soon, and of course you are frightfully busy. I am afraid grief makes one very selfish.”

“I don’t think you were ever very selfish, Isobel,” replied Farquhar in his grave, quiet tones. “I am, as you say, frightfully busy, but I have handed over all my briefs to a friend, and I am going to see you through all this sad business. I suppose you have wired to the Head of the Family?”

Isobel’s lip curled a little. “Yes, I have wired to the Head of the Family. I have got his answer. He is coming down to-morrow. My true friends are here to-day, yourself, and Lady Mary Rossett. By the way, how remiss of me not to have introduced you.”

Lady Mary rose, and held out her hand to the rising young barrister.

“But, dear Isobel, we have met before, on that well-remembered evening at the Savoy. You will no doubt recollect, Mr Farquhar, you were dining with a very dark-complexioned gentleman, evidently a foreigner.”

“Of course, I remember perfectly. The man who was my guest is my old friend Andres Moreno, a very capable journalist.”

Lady Mary looked approvingly at the grave young barrister.

Her heart was, of course, buried in the grave of the young Guardsman, but she felt a pleasurable thrill in this new acquaintance. There was something in his sedate demeanour that appealed to her practical and well-ordered nature – a nature that was apt occasionally to be disturbed by tempestuous and romantic moods.

“Where are you putting up?” asked Lady Mary casually.

“At the ‘Queen’s,’” answered Farquhar.

“Oh, so am I. I have taken a suite of rooms for myself and maid, while I am looking after dear Isobel. But it will be a little bit dull. Are you dining in the general room?”

“I certainly shall – unless – ” Farquhar looked towards Isobel.

Poor Isobel looked very distressed. “You are both such darlings,” she said, in her candid, impulsive way. “I should like to put you both up, to ask you to stay. But I shall be such poor company for you.”

They both understood. The bereaved girl wanted to be left alone with her dead, for that day at least. She welcomed their sympathy, but they could not mourn with her whole-hearted mourning.

Farquhar and Lady Mary drove back in the car to the “Queen’s.” Farquhar suggested tea. Lady Mary accepted the invitation willingly. There was something about this serious young barrister that attracted her.

Over the teacups they chatted.

“Tell me, are you going to be Lord Chancellor some day? You

have plenty of time.”

It was Lady Mary who put the question. Farquhar caught the spirit of her gay humour.

“Oh, no, nothing so stupendous as that. In my wildest dreams, I have never aspired to be anything higher than Solicitor or Attorney-General. I shall probably end by being a police magistrate, and cultivate a reputation for saying smart things.”

“Oh, but I shall be quite disappointed in you if you don’t become Lord Chancellor,” persisted Lady Mary, in her most girlish vein. “How dreadfully ancient we shall both be when you reach that exalted position. And then, think of your wife, she will be the first female subject in the kingdom. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s wife doesn’t count at all, although the Archbishop goes before you. Isn’t it comical?”

Farquhar fell in with her humorous mood. They had come from the house of mourning, but the poor old General had been very little to them. It was Isobel who stirred a generous chord of sympathy in their hearts. And Isobel was young, she had a lover, and she would recover shortly. The young do not mourn for ever after the old. Such is the inexorable law of nature.

They met again at dinner. The good understanding, begun at tea, was further cemented.

“You are going to be a sort of relation, in addition to being at least Attorney-General, or a police magistrate, or something of that sort,” said Lady Mary at the conclusion of the meal. “Do you shoot?”

“I can account for a few,” replied Farquhar, in his usual modest and cautious manner.

“Then you must come to Ticehurst Park in the autumn. I shall send you the invitation.”

“And your friends will be welcomed by Lord Saxham?”

Lady Mary smiled quite a brilliant smile. “I may tell you in confidence that my dear old father is as wax in my hands. Are you satisfied with that?”

Yes, Farquhar felt quite satisfied. But he thought of the grief-stricken girl keeping her lonely vigil in that quiet home, and his heart was very sore for her.

Still the world went on, and here was a very charming woman, not perhaps quite so youthful as Isobel, who was showing very plainly that she had taken an interest in him. The world was a very pleasant place.

Chapter Eleven

The Head of the Family arrived next day. He was a very stolid and bucolic-looking person, a breeder of prize oxen and fat sheep. He commiserated with poor Isobel in a heavy fashion.

“Strange thing going off like that,” he commented. “We are a very long-lived family. But your father was always a little bit different from the rest of us when he was a boy.”

Isobel said nothing in reply. She had seen several members of her father’s family at rare intervals, and she had not been greatly impressed by them. The only one she had really liked was Mrs Farquhar, the mother of her Cousin Maurice. She was a sweet, charming woman, the favourite sister of her dead father.

Mr Clandon fingered his moustache a little nervously. “I suppose you know all about his affairs, my dear? He has left you comfortably off, eh? He came into quite a tidy little bit when my father died.”

Isobel smiled faintly. Mr Clandon wanted to be assured that he was not going to have a penniless niece thrust upon his hands. She knew all about her father’s affairs. Had not the dear old General spent hours in instructing her as to the careful management of her small patrimony, when anything happened to him?

“Quite comfortably off, uncle, thanks to his loving care. With my simple wants, I shall be rich.”

“Very relieved to hear it,” said the bucolic Mr Clandon. “And,

of course, you are going to marry a rich man. Lord Saxham, I understand, is one of the wealthiest peers in England.”

“Reported to be,” corrected Isobel gently. “The estates are very heavily encumbered, and there are living three dowagers, and other pensioners who draw their portions.”

“God bless me,” said Mr Clandon, who was a very thrifty person. “What a frightful incubus! Then I take it your fiancé won’t get very much from that quarter?”

“Very little, I expect. But he will inherit a large fortune from his great-aunt, Lady Henrietta, a very old lady, over eighty.”

The Head of the Family looked relieved. He gazed with a certain respectful admiration at his good-looking niece. He had always recognised that she was a very pretty girl. At the present moment, grief had made great inroads on her good looks. But he thought somewhat sorrowfully of his own large family of girls, who were rather of the dumpling-faced order. They would have to seek their mates amongst the small squirearchy.

“I suppose my poor brother made a will?” was Mr Clandon’s next question.

“Oh, yes, he made his will years ago, after my mother’s death,” was Isobel’s answer. “He left her everything. When she died, he left me everything.”

“Quite right and proper,” observed Mr Clandon. He was very dull, but quite an upright and just person. He was relieved to find that his brother was more business-like than he thought. “And he has appointed executors, I suppose?”

“Yes, two – a very old friend, and my cousin, Maurice Farquhar.”

“Ah, Maurice Farquhar, Anne’s son! Yes, of course, your father and Anne were always great comrades. Maurice is getting on very well at the bar, I hear. You have seen a lot of him, I suppose. Somehow, we seemed to lose sight of Anne. We were such a big family, you know; and big families get scattered.”

Uncle Clandon had not the delicacy of Maurice or Lady Mary. He cordially accepted Isobel’s invitation to put him up. He was a very thrifty and careful person, and had no fancy to waste his money in expensive hotels, now that he knew his niece was left comfortably off.

The General was buried amongst his forbears in the family vault. When the sad business was over, Lady Mary took Isobel away to Ticehurst Park.

Guy Rossett had rushed over for the funeral, but he was so engrossed in diplomatic affairs that he had to leave immediately after.

The lovers had little time to say anything to each other. But Isobel was very much touched with Guy’s delicate feeling.

“Wasn’t he a darling to come over?” she said to Lady Mary. “I should have forgiven him if he hadn’t, but I love him ever so much more because he did.”

To which somewhat incoherent declaration Mary had replied with her usual air of experience and worldly wisdom.

“All men have something bad in them, and most women. But I

think dear old Guy has the least bad in him that a man can have.”

Lord Saxham was very kind, very gentle, very paternal to his son's betrothed. He had only seen General Clandon once, and he could not pretend to feel any great interest in him. But that sudden death reminded him that he also was nearing the goal. The remembrance of that fact softened, at least temporarily, his asperities, curbed his explosive temper.

The two girls were sitting in Mary's cosy little boudoir. It was a very charming room, reflecting in every detail the delicate and discriminating taste of the young *chatelaine*.

“Mary, I can never go back to Eastbourne. I loved that little home so much while he was there. But now it would be torture. I should see him in every room, and I should want to cry out to him and he could not speak to me. Oh, I don't think you can guess what we were to each other.”

“Have you thought of anything, dear?” asked Mary in her kind, gentle voice. She knew the girl was half hysterical with her sorrow.

“I should so love to go to Spain to be near Guy. Did I tell you dear father wanted to take me himself, only a few days before he died, and the doctor forbade him. Oh, Mary, if you could only come too?”

“I would love to,” said Mary slowly. “But you know as well as I do that my duty lies here. My father is old, I dare not leave him, and, in spite of his little faults of temper, he has been a dear, kind parent.”

“I understand perfectly,” was Isobel’s answer. “But, you see, nothing now ties me to England. All the world meant to me only two people, my father and Guy. Now, only Guy is left. I would love to be near him, even if he did not know.” Mary pondered a little. “I wonder if that nice cousin of yours could help in the matter?”

Isobel caught at the suggestion at once. “Yes, he is very clever. I will go up and see him to-morrow.”

“No need for that, dear. I will send him a wire at once, asking him to come down to-morrow to see you.”

“But he is always so frightfully busy,” cried Isobel.

“Bah!” said the more practical Lady Mary. “I know he is going to do wonderful things in the future, but he has plenty of time. When I send him that wire, he will come.”

Lady Mary sent off the telegram. It was quite a little excitement in her usually placid life. Farquhar came down as quickly as he could. He had handed over his briefs to a friend.

Lord Saxham greeted him kindly, being apprised by his daughter of his arrival. The poor old Earl was very subdued by now; he was quite prepared to make any amount of new acquaintances. His daughter had affairs well in hand.

Lady Mary plunged into matters at once.

“Isobel doesn’t want to go back to Eastbourne – that is quite natural. She is eager to go to Spain, to be near Guy. Of course nothing binds her to this country now.”

Mr Farquhar was not to be hurried. His judicial mind, if it

worked a little slowly, also worked very surely.

“I should not say that, at the present moment, Spain was a very desirable country for anybody, still less so for a young and unprotected woman.” He looked rather disapprovingly at Isobel for having harboured such daring thoughts.

“I shall take a maid, one of the servants we had at Eastbourne,” said Isobel, in a rather quaking voice. She had sense enough to see that, at the best, it was a wild venture.

Lady Mary shot at him an appealing glance. “Don’t you think you had better let Isobel have her way? And I expect she will have it whether you approve or not.”

There was also a little something more in that glance than Mary was quite conscious of. And the little something was this: Why was Maurice Farquhar so foolishly in love with Isobel, while Isobel was so devoted to Guy Rossett?

Farquhar looked from the younger to the elder girl. Lady Mary was very comely, she had behind her a long line of illustrious ancestry. She had been very sweet and gracious to him.

“Do you approve this rather daring scheme, Lady Mary?”

“On the whole, I think I do. Of course, I recognise the objections to it. But Isobel cannot go back to Eastbourne. If she stays in England she will be eating her heart out.”

Farquhar was, perhaps unconsciously, swayed by Lady Mary. He made up his mind to regard the suggestion with some degree of favour.

“I will do all I can to help. Unfortunately, I know next to

nothing of Spain. But I have a friend who knows it from A to Z. I will write to him and see how I can get her planted there.”

Of course, Lady Mary knew that Moreno was the friend. Isobel thanked him warmly.

“How sweet and dear of you,” she said. “Of course you understand, now my dear father is gone, there is nothing left but Guy.”

Farquhar understood. His cousin had spoken with the unconscious cruelty of the self-centred lover. She had not considered Maurice’s feelings at all.

Farquhar rose. “I will write the letter at once, if you will permit me.” He turned to Lady Mary, who led him to a small morning-room, and spread paper and envelopes before him.

“You are very fond of Isobel?” he asked, before he began his letter, a rather long one, to Moreno.

“I love her like a younger sister, Mr Farquhar,” replied Mary enthusiastically. “And, of course, she very soon will be my sister. And, moreover, being a woman, I love all true lovers. She and Guy are so absorbed in each other.”

“Ah!” said the youthful barrister shortly. “And you love your brother too?”

“Dear old Guy! I simply adore him. He is one of the most lovable of men.”

Farquhar looked at her a little quizzically. “You have, I should say, a most beautiful nature; you see good in everything and everybody, don’t you?” Lady Mary shook her head. “No. I am

more discriminating than you think. I fancy I can always tell the false from the true.”

“I wonder how you would reckon me up?”

“I will tell you, if you really wish,” was Mary’s candid answer.

“Yes, I do wish, honestly.”

“You are frightfully, painfully just. You are terribly cautious. And – ” She paused, and a faint blush spread over her cheek.

“Don’t spoil it, please. Finish what you were going to say. I can see you are a very discerning critic.”

Mary was a long time before she would answer. Then she turned away, and her blush deepened.

“I should say loyalty and honesty were your greatest characteristics. That you would be a sincere friend and a very generous enemy.”

She was leaving the room, but Farquhar darted up and detained her.

“I say, you know, that is the very greatest compliment I have ever had paid me,” he said, roused from his usual impassivity. “Will you think I am taking a liberty if I suggest that we shake hands on it?”

“Oh, not at all,” said Mary, in a rather fluttering way, as she put her hand in his.

She left the room, and he set about to write his letter to Moreno. But the disturbing vision of Lady Mary, with that faint flush on her cheek, appeared several times between the sentences of the rather lengthy epistle. That letter went out by the evening

post.

About the same time that these events were happening at the Park, Ferdinand Contraras was taking farewell of his family. He explained to them that he was going to Spain, he could not say how long he would be away. It might be a few days, it might be weeks. He had left plenty of money in the bank for their needs.

His wife and daughter watched him out of the house without any signs of emotion. To these two, who should have been his nearest and dearest, he had long appeared as a man out of touch with realities.

When the car rolled out of sight, Madame Contraras turned to her daughter.

“I have a presentiment, Inez, he will never come back. He is going to give his life as well as his fortune to this insane cause.”

Inez, who was rather callous, shrugged her shapely shoulders. “Why did you marry him, mother? He must have been mad then.”

“The madness of strong, impetuous youth, my child. I never thought it would last through middle and old age.”

Chapter Twelve

Contraras embarked on his great mission. Elderly man as he was, the fire of his convictions kept him alert and youthful.

He stayed a day in Madrid; from thence he travelled to Barcelona. And then he went on to Fonterrabia.

In the same little café, the “Concha,” he met several members of the brotherhood, Zorrilta, specially summoned, Alvedero, Andres Moreno, Violet Hargrave, and Mademoiselle Delmonte.

He opened the proceedings in his sharp, autocratic way. “You have already had a meeting about this particular *coup* which I planned in London.”

The young Frenchwoman spoke eagerly. If ever there was an enthusiast in the sacred cause, she was one. Ready to be burned or hanged for her principles, she had the spirit of the early Christian martyrs.

“We know all about it, Contraras.” In the spirit of true democracy, they addressed each other by no formal prefix. “I have undertaken it. It probably means death to me, I can only escape by a miracle, but it also means death to our enemies.”

Contraras looked at her approvingly from under his bushy eyebrows. “There spoke a true daughter of the Revolution which is to remake the world. If years had not come upon me, if my eyesight were more keen, my hand more sure, I would not delegate this task to another, less especially to a woman.”

Zorrilta hastened to observe obsequiously, "We cannot afford to hazard your precious life, Contraras. You are the head and brain of this organisation. The general directs the battle from safe ground. He does not go into the firing-line like the common soldier."

Contraras smiled, well pleased. Like most great men, he was very susceptible to flattery, as easily susceptible as the most despotic monarch that ever ruled.

"I appreciate your devotion to the cause, your loyalty to myself," he said in his most gracious manner. "When this great blow is struck, when we make a most terrible example, the echoes of it will reverberate through the world. The downtrodden population will arise, the world-revolution will be in being."

There was a subdued murmur of applause at the conclusion of his speech. Moreno applauded the loudest; somehow Violet Hargrave could never force herself to be very enthusiastic. Moreno was watching her very narrowly.

Mademoiselle Delmonte spoke. "I cannot say how proud I am to have had this task deputed to me." She looked very brave and resolute.

The meeting lasted for over half an hour. Details of the great *coup* were settled. Contraras had a powerful and logical brain. He never allowed digressions or diversions, he always kept everybody to the point. When the meeting broke up two people were very radiant, Contraras, who had planned the *coup*, the enthusiastic Valerie Delmonte, who had undertaken to

carry it into execution, with or without assistance, as might be determined.

They strolled out from the obscure little café one by one. Moreno presently overtook Mrs Hargrave, in her peasant dress. They lodged near each other; it was natural they should stroll along together in the direction of their respective homes.

Behind them came Contraras, and the two other men who had joined forces after leaving the café. Contraras looked after the two young people with those keen eyes which age had not very greatly dimmed.

“The Englishwoman I know well,” he whispered to Alvedero. “She is a protégée, almost an adopted daughter, of our staunch comrade Jaques. What about this Moreno? Is he to be trusted?”

“You know that Luçue vouches for both.”

“Ah!” sighed Contraras. “Luçue is a keen judge of men. I have never known him make a mistake. But I do not like the English mother.”

“And, in the case of Violet Hargrave, you have the English father. And yet, you have no suspicion of her.”

Contraras nodded his massive head, the head with the broad, deep brow of the thinker.

“Your remark is just, my friend. I chose Violet Hargrave myself, on the recommendation of my friend Jaques; that, of course, prejudices me in her favour. Moreno was chosen by Luçue. Perhaps I am a little bit jealous of Luçue. And I am growing old.”

“No,” cried Alvedero, with whole-hearted admiration. “Give you another ten years yet, and you will still be the brains and leading spirit of this organisation. Zorrilita is good, Luçue has a touch of genius. But there is only one Contraras. Ten years hence you will be our leader, as you are to-day.” And while Contraras and Alvedero were exchanging these confidences, Moreno was talking to Violet Hargrave.

“We seem to be engaged in a pretty bloodthirsty business, don’t you think, Mrs Hargrave? Not much in common with Fleet Street, or the flat in Mount Street, eh?”

Violet Hargrave smiled. “We have both come out here to find adventure. Spain is a land of surprises. We shall have plenty of adventure before we have done with it.”

There was a grim note in the journalist’s tones, as he answered: “On this particular *coup*, engineered by our great leader, Contraras, it seems to me as likely as not that you and I shall meet our deaths. The one person who seems perfectly happy over the business is Mademoiselle Delmonte. By the way, she went out the first. She must have flown along like the wind. The others are behind. I can see them through the back of my head. I can wager they are just discussing whether we can be trusted – you, with your English father, I, with my English mother.”

He shot at her a penetrating glance, but she did not move a muscle.

“The southern blood in both is stronger than the northern,” she answered calmly. “And we are each a true son and daughter

of the Revolution.”

He came to the conclusion that, for the moment, Violet Hargrave was impenetrable. Would he ever be able to disturb that *sang-froid*?

When he reached his humble lodgings, for it was a part of his rôle to live plainly, he found a long letter from his old friend, Maurice Farquhar.

It was the letter that had been written from Ticehurst Park. It explained at great length that Isobel Clandon had lost her father, that there were no longer any ties to bind her to England, that she wanted to be near her lover, in view of the danger that threatened him. Above all, that she did not wish Guy to know, at any rate for the present. Could Moreno help?

The young man knitted his brows. His first impulse was to write back and strongly oppose the scheme. Then his subtle mind began to work, half unconsciously. Isobel Clandon over in Madrid could do no harm. He would not prophesy that she would do any good. But there was no knowing what might happen with this bloodthirsty brotherhood. She might be useful.

He knew an English couple living in Madrid, old connections of his mother; he was sure they would willingly take in Isobel as a boarder. They were not rich people, only just in comfortable circumstances, they were elderly and childless. They would welcome a young girl as a member of their household.

He would go to Madrid to-morrow and interview them. And he could kill two birds with one stone while he was there.

He interviewed the elderly couple; they would be delighted to receive Miss Clandon.

Afterwards, in response to a letter received at the Embassy, Guy Rossett met the young journalist in the same obscure restaurant in Madrid, where he had met him previously.

“Things are humming a bit, eh?” queried Moreno, as they sat at a small table, quaffing a bottle of light wine.

“Looks like it,” answered Rossett, speaking with the usual English phlegm. “I’ve had some very important information over to-day.”

“Most of which, I expect, has been supplied by me, not but what I admit there are two or three very good men out on the job.” Moreno was dreadfully conceited, but he could be generous when he chose. He would sometimes allow that there were other people who might be – well, nearly as clever as himself.

“Well, Moreno, you wanted to see me. I take it, you have a reason?”

“Of course I have. I know you ultimately hear everything from headquarters. But that takes time, and I am on the spot.”

“I know all that,” said Rossett. “Besides, I have instructions from headquarters to keep in touch with you, because you *are* on the spot.”

“That is really awfully good of them, when you come to think of it,” said Moreno in his quiet, sarcastic way. “Fancy them relaxing red tape to that extent! I fancy there is a new spirit abroad.”

“Well, what is it?” asked Rossett a little impatiently.

Moreno puffed at his cigar a little time before he answered.

“I am going to put a very direct question to you. Some time ago you gave some very important information to the Secret Service about this anarchist movement. It is due to that that you are here.”

“Yes, I did,” answered Guy shortly.

“You know we are both practically in the same service,” said Moreno slowly, “and we might be frank with each other. Was that information given under the seal of secrecy?”

Guy nodded. “Yes, it was, absolutely.”

“As an honourable man, you could not reveal the name of your informant? I can give you my word, it is very important.”

Guy thought for a few seconds. “No, I cannot give you the name of my informant. It was done absolutely under the seal of secrecy.”

“I understand,” said Moreno. “And a very considerable price was paid to the man – or woman – I am convinced it was a woman, who sold you this information.”

“Quite right. But why do you say it was a woman?” asked Guy Rossett quickly.

“If I had not already been sure it was a woman, my friend, I should be quite sure of it by your sudden question. You English people are not quite so subtle as we who have southern blood in our veins.”

Rossett bit his lip. He felt he had given himself away to this quick-witted foreigner, nine-tenths Spanish and one-tenth

English.

There was a long pause. Moreno shifted his point of attack.

“Do you know that Mrs Hargrave is over in Spain, in Fonterrabia?”

“What!” almost shouted Guy in his astonishment.

Moreno looked at him steadily. “Ah, you have not heard that from headquarters. Well, you see, they don’t know the little side-currents as well as I do. They do not know, for instance, that she is a sworn and apparently zealous member of the brotherhood.”

“Violet Hargrave, of all people!” cried Rossett. He was in a state of bewilderment.

“You know, I daresay, that Mrs Hargrave is no friend of yours now, whatever she may have been once,” said Moreno, speaking in his quiet, level tones.

“Yes, I think I can understand that.”

“Come, Mr Rossett, throw off a little of that insular reserve, and let us talk together quite frankly. Believe me, I am speaking entirely in your own interests. There is no doubt that, at one time, you paid Mrs Hargrave very marked attention, that you fed her hopes very high.”

“I was a bit of a fool, certainly,” admitted Guy.

“And then, pardon me for speaking quite frankly, you threw her over rather abruptly, because you had fallen in love with somebody else – a woman, of course, a thousand times superior to the discarded one.”

“You seem to know all about it, Mr Moreno.”

“It is my business to know things,” replied the journalist quietly. “Well, it is a case of the ‘woman scorned,’ you know. I should say the fair Violet hated you now as much as she once loved you.”

“It may be possible. I have a notion that you know women better than I do.”

“Bad women perhaps,” said Moreno quietly. “My experience has lain rather in their direction. I think I have only known three good women in my life, two of whom were my mother and a girl I was once engaged to – she died a week before our wedding day.”

Rossett regarded him with a sympathetic gaze. So this swarthy, black-browed young Spaniard had had his romance. His voice had broken as he spoke of his dead sweetheart.

“I am sorry for your experience. Most of the women I have known have been very good, the fingers of one hand would count the bad. But tell me more about Violet Hargrave. She hates me, you say?”

“I should say with a very bitter and malignant hatred,” was Moreno’s answer.

“All arising, of course, from jealousy or disappointment. How far is this hatred going to lead her?”

“I should say to the furthest point.”

Rossett recoiled. “You mean to say she can have so changed that she would contemplate that?”

Moreno did not mince his words. “You will take my word for it that it is revenge she seeks, and she will not hesitate. Her position

in the brotherhood will give her a very plausible excuse.”

For a moment, Guy Rossett lost his head. “Yes, you told me just now, I remember, she belonged to the brotherhood. But I always understood – ”

He paused; Moreno noted that sudden pause. Rossett had been on the point of saying something that would have revealed much.

The young man leaned forward and whispered.

“Mr Rossett, do you still refuse to give me the name of your informant?”

“I am afraid I cannot,” was the firm reply. “My word was given, you understand.” Again he seemed on the point of saying something further, and refrained.

Moreno shrugged his shoulders. “I admire your scrupulousness, but I still think you are very foolish in your own interests. Still, I know what you Englishmen are. If my suspicions had been confirmed by your positive evidence, my hands would have been very much strengthened. I could have dealt with the matter in a very positive and speedy way.”

Rossett kept silence. It was the safest method with the subtle young Spaniard, who took notice of every word and every glance, and rapidly constructed a theory out of the most slender facts.

“There is no more to be said, so far as that is concerned,” said Moreno quietly. “You could have made it very easy for me; as it is, I shall have to expend more time and trouble. But trust me, I shall get the information I want in good time. I shall find people in your own walk of life less scrupulous than you are yourself.”

“Perhaps,” replied Rossett briefly.

“I am keeping watch and ward over you, as you know,” went on Moreno in lighter tones. “And I promise you I will give you plenty of notice of danger.”

“It is pretty near, eh?” queried Rossett.

“Not very far off, I can assure you. I am seeing the Chief of the Spanish police to-morrow. I have some very important information to give him.”

The next day Moreno had a long interview with the Chief of Police, and also with the Head of the Spanish Secret Service. Both the officials made copious notes at the respective interviews. When he left them Moreno felt he had done good work. He was sure that he could outwit Zorrilta, Alvedero, even the great Contraras himself.

He took a flying visit to England after this, having two objects in view. First, he wanted to see Isobel to arrange the details of her journey to Madrid. He lunched with her and Lady Mary at a quiet little restaurant in Soho. He promised to meet her on her arrival at Madrid and conduct her to her friends. He would say nothing to Guy Rossett till he had her permission.

For at the eleventh hour Isobel’s heart a little failed her. From what point of view would Guy contemplate this rather wild adventure? Would he take it as a proof of her devoted love, or would he frown at the escapade, as a little unwomanly? Men of the straightforward English type like Rossett are apt to be a little uncertain in their judgment of what is seemly in their

womenkind, and what is the reverse.

After luncheon, he went to keep an appointment with one of the chiefs of the English Secret Service. This gentleman received him very graciously. Moreno stood high in his estimation. He had rendered very valuable service in the past and the present.

“Delighted to see you, Mr Moreno. But I should have thought at the moment you could hardly be spared from Spain, more especially the neighbourhood of Fonterrabia, and Madrid.”

“I never take a holiday, sir, unless I feel I am justified. In this instance I am. It is true I had a little private business on in England at this particular time, which does not concern your department. But I have sandwiched that in.”

The grey-haired gentleman listened politely. Moreno, as he knew by experience, did not make many mistakes.

“Some little time ago, Mr Guy Rossett, at present attached to Madrid, gave you some very important information about the anarchist movement in Spain.”

“Ah, you know, do you?” was the cautious answer.

“Of course, I have known it for a long time. For very special reasons I want to know the name of the man or woman who gave that information to Rossett. I will give you my reasons presently.”

The other man thought a moment. “Yes, I remember the details perfectly. Rossett handed us certain memoranda which he had obtained from somebody, whose name he would not disclose.”

“That is exactly like Rossett. I have attacked him direct and

he still keeps silence. As an honourable Englishman he remains staunch to his promise. One cannot blame him, although in his own interests it would be better if he were a little less scrupulous.”

The grey-haired man began to get interested. “Give me a few more details, Mr Moreno, so that I can see what you are driving at.”

Moreno unfolded his suspicions briefly. He finished his story with the words, “If you could not make Rossett speak, I cannot. But you have those memoranda in your archives. Will you show them to me so that I may see if I recognise the handwriting.”

The other thought for a moment before he replied. Even in the Secret Service everything is conducted with the most scrupulous fairness, although their opponents are destitute of the elementary principles of honesty.

Then he made up his mind. “From what you have told me, I think it is wise that I should show you these memoranda, with a view to strengthening your hand. Kindly wait a few minutes and I will fetch them.”

He was only away a very short time, but Moreno’s nerves were on the rack during the brief absence. Were his suspicions going to be absolutely confirmed, or still left in the region of mere conjecture?

The grey-haired man came back, and placed half a dozen closely covered sheets before him. They were in a small, clear, feminine handwriting.

Triumph glared in Moreno’s dark eyes. “As I guessed. She

wasn't clever enough to disguise her hand. I can understand she could not run the risk of having them copied. Why didn't she get Rossett to write them out at her dictation?"

The other man made no reply to this ebullition on the part of the young Spaniard.

"Of course you can't part with these, or any one page of them?" asked Moreno.

"Out of the question," came the expected answer. "I quite agree. But you can get photographs taken of them, and then I shall have this woman in the hollow of my hand."

"That shall be done, Mr Moreno. You are going back to Spain to-day. They shall be sent to you to-morrow at whatever address you leave with me." And Moreno walked out of the cosy little room well pleased with himself. Guy Rossett might have saved him all this trouble if he had chosen to open his mouth. Still, he had got the information he wanted. And, above all, what a fool Violet Hargrave had been, to let those memoranda go out in her own handwriting! Moreno, who thought of every detail, would not have done that.

Chapter Thirteen

The great anarchical association of which Ferdinand Contraras was the leading spirit did not differ greatly in essential features from those tyrannical and effete institutions which it was striving to supersede.

There was still the wide gulf between the classes, bridged over speciously by the fact that they addressed each other as "comrade," waiving all distinctive titles.

The chief addressed the educated young fisherman as Somoza shortly, which was natural. And, on the other hand, Somoza addressed him, though always very respectfully, as Contraras, which would not have been at all natural, under ordinary circumstances.

Still, Somoza did not slap him on the back, or take liberties, as he would have done with an elderly fisherman in his own rank of life. The gulf of class could not quite be crossed by dropping titles, and calling each other comrade.

And then there was the question of wealth. Contraras, in spite of his numerous donations to the cause, was still rich; so was Jaques. Zorrilta was moderately well-off. Alvedero and Luçue were poor. The sharing out had not begun yet. Luçue, as we know, lived in humble lodgings in Soho, which galled him somewhat, as he was fond of comfort and the flesh-pots.

Contraras, after a brief sojourn at Fonterrabia had come back

to Madrid, where he had many friends in his own sphere of life. Although not of noble birth himself, he had married a woman, a member of a family poor but boasting of the proudest blood of Spain in its veins.

At Madrid he had engaged a suite of rooms at the Ritz Hotel in the Plaza de Canovas, near the Prado Museum. Democrat and anarchist as he was in theory, the man delighted in displaying a certain amount of ostentation, whether at home or abroad.

A little aware of his weakness in this direction, he consoled himself by the thought that in doing this he was throwing dust in the eyes of people of his own class – that he could more successfully carry on his propaganda, because nobody would ever suspect him of seeking to overthrow the régime under which he had prospered so exceedingly.

The young Frenchwoman, Valerie Delmonte, was in Madrid at the same time also as Contraras. She was staying at an equally luxurious hostelry – the Grand Hotel de la Paix in the Puerta del Sol. She also had a suite of rooms, imitating her illustrious chief.

She chose to be known by her maiden name of Mademoiselle Valerie Delmonte. It did not suit her emancipated notions that a woman should sink her identity in that of a husband. She had borne with the infliction for three short years of married life. When her elderly husband, a rich Paris financier, died she found herself a very wealthy woman. Monsieur Varenne had no near kith or kin. With the exception of a few handsome legacies, he had left all his money to this young woman who was very

handsome and still young, only in the late twenties.

Contraras was an anarchist by profound and philosophical conviction. He had persuaded himself that revolution, open and brutal revolution, was the only cure for a rotten and diseased world.

Valerie had arrived at the same conclusion from a merely personal standpoint – from the point of view of her own feelings. Naturally of a morbid temperament, absolutely a child of the gutter, the offspring of drunken and dissolute parents who had starved and beaten her, she had suffered no illusions as to what existence meant for the impoverished.

She was a sharp-witted child, with plenty of brain-power, and a marvellous capacity for self-education. At the age of twelve her parents had sold her for a paltry sum to the proprietor of a travelling circus. This man had perceived at once that there was plenty of grit in the precocious child. He had got her very cheap. If he trained her carefully he might make a good deal of money out of her.

The precocious little Valerie left her parents without the slightest regret – her life had been one long torture with them. The circus-proprietor was a big, burly man, not destitute of a rough geniality. There was a hard look in his eyes, a dogged squareness of the jaw that suggested a latent brutality.

On the whole, however, he was a welcome relief from her former torturers, who had never thrown a kind word to her from the day of her birth. Sometimes he was generous, sometimes he

was brutal, as the mood took him. Often he swore at her till she trembled in every limb. Occasionally, in his cups, he beat her. But he was always sorry the next day, and did his best to make amends. In short, he was a ruffian with a certain amount of decent feeling, and an uncertain temperament.

She stayed with him till she was seventeen. She might have stayed with him for ever, had not a sudden severance been put to their relations, by the man's sudden death, brought about prematurely by his constant indulgence in alcohol.

Valerie could never recall the years that succeeded without a shudder. The circus was broken up, she was left helpless and friendless.

It was during those terrible years that the iron entered her soul, when she experienced the keen, cruel suffering of the really poor, when she went to bed night after night, cold and hungry, after tramping the streets in vain for work.

A weaker spirit would have succumbed to the temptation that was always at hand, for she was a very attractive girl. But she was resolved, with her indomitable grit, to keep herself pure. She turned away disdainfully from the leering old men, the callous young ones who accosted her as she paced the streets in her restless tramp for an honest living. Better the river than that!

After many vicissitudes, she came to anchor at last. She was then about twenty-two. She was very clever at educating herself. She had taught herself to sing, she had taught herself to play the piano, she had taught herself to dance.

She got an engagement at one of the minor halls in Paris to do a turn which combined singing and dancing. She was very pretty and attractive. In a small way she made a name. At the end of three months the manager trebled her salary.

To this minor music hall came one night the rich financier, a somewhat shady one, if the truth must be told, Monsieur Varenne, a man of about fifty-five who had never married.

He was greatly attracted by this elegant young girl. Her voice was small, her dancing was nothing great. But there was an indefinable charm about her that appealed to his somewhat jaded senses.

He obtained an introduction through the manager, who was only too anxious to oblige such a well-known personage. He invited her to supper. She accepted the invitation graciously, but coldly. Her coldness inflamed him the more.

When they met, he was surprised at her cleverness, the correctness with which she expressed herself. This was certainly no ordinary girl of the music halls.

“Tell me something about yourself, my dear,” he said, as they sat over their coffee. “I did not expect to find you such a charming companion.”

Valerie smiled a little bitterly. “I have not very much to tell. I expect my lot has been like that of many thousands in this delightful world. I am a child of the gutter. My father and mother beat and starved me, and sold me for a paltry sum to the proprietor of a travelling circus. It wasn’t exactly a rosy life

then, but it was paradise to where I had been. He died; I was thrown on my beam ends. I can't tell you what I have been through for the last few years. I couldn't bear to talk of it – I have suffered everything that the poor have to suffer in such profusion – cold, hunger, the most absolute misery. And, at last," she looked round at the luxurious appointments of the restaurant a little disdainfully, "I find myself in receipt of a decent salary, and the guest of a rich man who has pressed upon me every dainty. And I have so often wanted a meal!"

Varenne was a very kindly man, in spite of his somewhat sharp ways in business. Those last few pathetic words had gone straight to his heart. She had often wanted a meal, and she was a most attractive girl! Many would have called her beautiful.

"It is a sad history, my poor child," he said sympathetically. He paused a moment before he put the delicate question. "And during those terrible years, when you suffered hunger and privation, you kept yourself straight? It would have been so easy to go wrong, so excusable under the circumstances."

"Of course," she answered, and there was a note of wounded pride, of indignation, in her voice. "I am not that sort of woman – better the river than that. I might give myself to a man out of love or gratitude, but never merely for money."

It was a new experience for the wealthy financier. Here was a girl who had just stepped off the platform of a music hall, where she was, no doubt, earning a very modest salary, who had grit and backbone in her, and, moreover, a proper pride and self-respect.

He had, of course, with the easy confidence of a man of the world, imagined the usual termination to such an adventure. But he recognised at once that he could not make any proposition of the kind he meditated. He pressed her hand tenderly at parting, and arranged a further meeting.

They met several times, and Varenne went through agonies of indecision. But the attraction was too strong, and at last he asked her to marry him. It was that or losing her altogether.

And did it matter much? His world would laugh at him as a matter of course, say he had got into his dotage. And a girl who was young enough to be his daughter! There is no fool like an old fool, he told himself rather ruefully.

But she had so subjugated him that he was quite a humble wooer in spite of the enormous advantages he was offering her.

“Of course I am an old man, I cannot expect you to have any real affection for me,” he said.

She met his glance quite frankly. “I have never been in love with anybody; my life has been too hard to permit me to indulge in the softer emotions. But I like you very much. I have always hated rich men; they think they can buy anything with their gold. You are a rich man, I know, you have told me so yourself, but you have a kind nature and a good heart.”

“And can you overlook the disparity of years?” he questioned, still very humble.

“I am twenty-two, but I don’t think I am very young; I am old in experience and bitterness. Well, if you care to risk the

experiment, I will be your wife. I will do my best to make you happy.”

They were married. And this marriage was the turning point in Valerie's life. If everything had gone smoothly, she might have forgotten those bitter experiences, outlived her still more bitter rancour against the prosperous and well-to-do.

Unfortunately the friends of Monsieur Varenne would not forgive him for this false step, so unpardonable in a man of his intelligence and position. He was a fool, that was clear, but they were not going to abet him in his mad folly. Their doors were shut against his wife, this creature of the music halls, to whom he was going to leave his fortune.

After this bitter experience, the iron entered even deeper into her soul. Her husband was kindness and tenderness itself. In his devotion to his young wife, he paid no attention to the fact that he had cut himself off from his old friends, his old social life.

He was ready to comply with her slightest wish. He showered on her the most costly gifts, his purse was absolutely at her disposal. She had everything that wealth could give, except the one thing she craved, to mix on equal terms with these people who despised her.

When the kindly old man died, she mourned him sincerely. If she had never loved him, in the true sense of the word, she had felt for him a very warm and grateful affection. On his death-bed, she had faltered forth a few words of self-reproach, had blamed herself for taking advantage of his generosity, for not

having sufficiently counted the cost to himself.

On this point he had reassured her. "I have been very happy, my dear, happier than I ever expected to be. I would not have anything changed."

She came into that considerable fortune which was of so little use to her. During her few years of married life she had educated herself into a woman of considerable accomplishments, for she had a very quick and acute intelligence.

Her socialist proclivities were now fully developed, after the scurvy treatment at the hands of her husband's friends. The circles where these doctrines were preached readily opened their doors to an attractive and enthusiastic young woman, whose wealth would be very useful for propaganda. She was more than the equal of these purse-proud parvenus, who would not accept her acquaintance, in intellect and behaviour. She felt it bitterly.

Very soon she came under the influence of Contraras, who was possessed of great personal magnetism. His reasoned arguments, his fiery eloquence, quickly led her a step further – from socialism to anarchy. In a very short space she became one of the leading spirits of the brotherhood. As the old régime would not receive her, she would do her best to overthrow it, and assert the doctrine of absolute equality.

Contraras came frequently to the Grand Hotel de la Paix to visit his young colleague. He had very charming manners, this elderly enthusiast, and Valerie liked him very much, apart from his principles. He was one of the few rich men she had

ever known, her late husband being another, whom she did not despise. He was no mere hoarder of wealth, using it as a means to enslave his less fortunate fellow-creatures.

Contraras came in one afternoon in a very cheerful mood. She looked at him eagerly. She could read his countenance pretty well by now.

“You have something to tell me, Contraras?”

The old man smiled. “Yes, my dear, I have got what we wanted. You can walk in boldly. There will be no smuggling through the back door, although we could have managed that, if the other had failed.”

“Did you get it in the quarter you expected?”

“Yes; I had a little tussle with del Pineda, but I overcame his scruples. Besides, he is considerably in my debt. I assured him that he would never be accused of complicity, that I would take all the blame on my own shoulders.”

He rubbed his hands and chuckled softly.

“What does Contraras, a man of means and position, with powerful connections in Spain, know of the secret sentiments of Mademoiselle Delmonte, a charming young lady of wealth, whom he has met abroad? Mademoiselle Delmonte asks for his good offices in a certain matter of a most, apparently, innocent nature. He places himself at her disposal, and secures what she wants through the agency of a certain Duke who is equally ignorant of her real purposes.”

A dreamy look stole into the young woman’s eyes. She spoke

in a low voice, as if she were muttering to herself.

“A week to wait, only just one little week. And then, if all goes as we think and hope – the dawn of the new era! But I shall not live to see it.”

Chapter Fourteen

Moreno met Isobel and her maid at the railway station, and drove them to the home of his friends, the Godwins, who lived in a respectable but not particularly fashionable quarter of Madrid.

Mrs Godwin, a buxom and kind-faced woman, received the girl with open arms. Mr Godwin had discreetly absented himself during the first meeting of the two women.

“So delighted to see you, Miss Clandon. I was a very intimate friend of Andres’ mother. Any friend of his is very welcome. I shall do my best to make you happy during your stay here. I am afraid the accommodation is not what you have been used to. We are a little cramped for room.”

A dear good honest *bourgeoise* creature. Isobel took to her at once. She felt the *milieu* was not quite what she could have desired, but Moreno had done all he could, most probably out of his old friendship for Farquhar. Whatever discomforts she might have to endure, well – she had brought them on herself by embarking on this daring adventure.

Mr Godwin came in presently, a large, heavy man, who greeted her with great gravity. She learned afterwards that he had been connected with the wine trade, and had retired from active business on a respectable competence.

Moreno took his departure as soon as he could. He had several matters on hand, besides looking after a wandering maiden of a

romantic turn of mind.

Isobel stayed him at the door. "When am I going to see Guy?" she whispered.

The young journalist looked at her kindly. He remembered his own too short-lived romance. That whisper had come straight from her heart.

"Ah, that is for you," he said. "You know, you confessed you were a little doubtful about how he would look upon it. Will you ask Lady Mary to write him the news, or would you rather that I should?"

Isobel interrupted him eagerly. "Oh, would you? Lady Mary is a darling, and devoted to us both. But if I write to her, and she has to write to Guy, it may be ages before we meet. And, besides," she added with the unconscious guile of a woman, "in certain things, men are so much better diplomatists than women. I am sure you could put everything from a reasonable point of view, present everything in quite a favourable light. I do not want him to think I am a masculine sort of person, an enlightened female who goes tearing about all over the world after a man she loves."

Moreno was a very kind-hearted fellow. He could not resist that wistful look in the beautiful dark eyes. The girl was alone in the world. She had just lost her father; Guy was now her sheet-anchor.

"I say, if you want to see him quickly, why not send a note round to the Embassy, just giving him your address, and saying simply, 'I am here'?"

But Isobel rather shrank from that. It seemed too bold, perhaps a little unmaidenly. She had always been educated in the belief that a woman should never make advances. Advances might be made through a third party, perhaps, if they were made with discretion.

“But you could explain it all so much better than I could, Mr Moreno, how the whole thing was led up to by your letter to Lady Mary.”

Moreno looked at his watch. “I was going to leave Madrid in half an hour. Well, I can catch a train three hours later, it won’t make much difference. I will be off at once to the Embassy, and catch Rossett there, if not, at his flat. You, of course, can see him at any time, to-day or to-morrow?”

“A thousand thanks,” replied Isobel, with her charming smile. “Yes, I shall not stir out much anyway. But I will keep in the two whole days.”

“Mrs Godwin, I warn you, will insist on showing you the sights of Madrid.”

“I will resist her,” said Isobel firmly.

Moreno smiled, and said good-bye. It was a little pathetic, he thought, the patient, loving woman ready to wait the man’s convenience. Ever the way with true love.

A brief drive to the Embassy in the Calle Fernando el Santo, a hastily pencilled note sent up to Rossett. Half an hour later, the two men were seated at a different rendezvous, for this time Moreno was not in his working-man’s dress. He had to be very

cautious.

Moreno went to the point at once. "I have news that will startle you, Mr Rossett. Your fiancée Miss Clandon, is in Madrid at this moment." He named the respectable but unfashionable quarter in which the girl had taken up her abode.

"What?" shouted Guy Rossett in his astonishment. It was just the same ejaculation he had used when he learned that Violet Hargrave was in Spain. The vocabulary of the average Englishman is very limited when he has to express sudden emotion. And Guy was quite the average type.

"Of course you are very surprised. Well, I am afraid it is all due to me. You remember some time ago I begged you to get out of this place. You refused. I took it on myself to write to your sister to use your father's influence to get you recalled. That fell through too."

"It was very kind of you to interfere in my private affairs, Mr Moreno," observed Rossett stiffly.

"You are a bit of responsibility to me, Mr Rossett," replied the journalist in his usual imperturbable fashion. "I will tell you frankly I should be very glad to see the back of you to-morrow, for your own sake – " He added in a lower voice, "Still more for the sake of the girl who loves you as much as you love her."

"Forgive me," cried Rossett hastily. "I quite appreciate that you mean very well to both of us."

"Thank you," said Moreno. "Well, to get on with my story. I have a very old chum, one Maurice Farquhar who happens to be

a cousin of your fiancée. One night, in his chambers, I hinted that danger was threatening you here. It seems he told Miss Clandon. As I have stated, I wrote to your sister. The two women put their heads together. Miss Clandon's father died. She had no longer any ties binding her to England. She was mad to come out here to be near you. As men of the world, we might say, the unreasoning caprice of a very loving woman."

"It was very sweet and dear of her," said Guy. There was a little break in his voice as he spoke. "But I am interrupting you in your story. Please go on."

"There is not much more to tell. As I have said, the two women put their heads together. Lady Mary sent for Farquhar to consult him as to how Miss Clandon could get to Spain. She felt if she consulted you, you would, under the circumstances, have vetoed the project altogether."

"I don't think there is the slightest doubt I should," said Rossett, quite frankly.

"I agree. Well, they were not going to give you the chance. They took matters into their own hands. Farquhar knew nothing about Spain; he wrote to me to ask me if I could help them. Well, I helped them. I went over to London, saw your sister and Miss Clandon, and arranged for the journey. I met her at the station to-day, took her to the house of some very respectable English people whom I have known from my boyhood, not people of your class, nor of Miss Clandon's. But I think there she will be very quiet and comfortable."

Guy Rossett leaned across the table and held out his hand.

“A thousand thanks, Mr Moreno. After this, we must be firm friends. My brave little Isobel, how plucky and daring of her. And you took all this trouble!”

There was no suspicion in his frank tones, but Moreno liked to clear up everything as he went on.

“Yes, it took up a good deal of my time, but I didn’t grudge it. I saw your fiancée and sister dining one night with you at the Savoy, but had never spoken to them in my life. But Farquhar is an old chum of mine; he has done me some very good turns. I was pleased to return the compliment.”

There was a brief pause, before Moreno spoke again. “I left Miss Clandon a little time ago. She is longing to see you. I suggested she should send round a note to you. She seemed a little fearful of what you might think of her hasty action. She begged me to come round and explain matters. That is why I am here. Here is her address.”

“Again a thousand thanks.” Rossett looked at his watch. “Unfortunately, I have to dine at the Embassy to-night, and there is no getting out of that. We are the slaves of duty. I have only just time to get back and dress. I will leave as soon after dinner as I decently can, and go round to her.”

“Away with you, duty calls,” said Moreno, rising briskly. “I will send a note round to her saying I have seen you, and that you will be there to-night.” It was late when Rossett, hurrying as fast as he could, entered the small drawing-room of the flat tenanted

by the respectable Godwins. Isobel was alone; the worthy couple, with commendable tact, had absented themselves. Moreno had told them just as much as it was well for them to know, and they were not very inquisitive people.

It was a very delightful meeting. They had been longing for each other since they last parted. They exchanged their vows of love all over again.

“And you are sure you are not angry with me, Guy?” asked Isobel, as they sat hand in hand on the rather hard sofa.

“Angry, my brave little darling. Why should I be? But I say, this is not the sort of place for you, you know. Have you brought a maid with you?”

“Yes, our old parlourmaid, Ethel. I don’t suppose you remember her.”

“Yes, I do. Well, you must go the Ritz, or one of the good hotels.”

“Oh, please no, dearest. I have no chaperon, you see, and it might look queer. Besides, I don’t want to meet a lot of people, and have to explain things. I would much prefer to stay here *incognita*. Dear Mrs Godwin is quite a motherly old soul, and knows nothing of what is going on in the great world except what she learns from the newspapers. And I am not so far off, after all. You can come and see me sometimes.”

“Every day, darling,” cried Rossett. On reflection, he was inclined to think that, under the very peculiar circumstances, Isobel’s course of action was the right one. If she blossomed forth

at a fashionable hotel, a great deal would have to be explained. In a censorious and conventional world, young women, however pure in heart, cannot afford to be adventurous.

As they sat on the sofa, she told him at great length of her visit to Ticehurst Park, and the Earl's consent to their engagement, of his endeavour to get her to use her influence to lure Guy from his post, of her refusal, in which she had been staunchly supported by her father. She had told him briefly of this at the funeral, but he had been so pressed for time that she had only supplied him with the barest details.

“The old dad, he was always great at a bargain, but this time you got the better of him, my darling.”

Then he put his hand in his breast pocket, and drew forth a letter. “By Jove, I had very nearly forgotten – a letter received this morning from that dear old Aunt Henrietta. I won't read you all of it, there are yards, but I'll just run through a passage that concerns us.”

This was the passage he read. “I hear a great deal from Mary, who as you know is a most indefatigable correspondent, about your fiancée, Isobel Clandon. She describes her as a most sweet and lovable girl. There were always the two types in the Rossett family, the practicable and the romantic. You, Mary, and myself belong to the latter. I married for love, Mary would have done, and you are going to.

“I hear also your post is rather a dangerous one, and that they have tried to get you recalled, but that you will not hear of it.

Well, I admire your spirit and sense of duty. Still, as soon as you can retire with honour, do so.

“Now that your father has given his consent, there is nothing to wait for. I shall make the way easy for you, as I have always tried to do. Bring your Isobel to see me at the first opportunity. I am longing to make her acquaintance.”

“What a darling!” cried Isobel enthusiastically. “Well, anyway, there are three dear people in the present Rossett family, your Aunt, Mary, and yourself. And Lord Saxham is not so bad after all.”

In her happiness she freely forgave the old gentleman his former hostility, his attempt to drive a bargain with her.

“No, he’s by no means so bad, when you get to know him, to pierce through the crust as it were. He is a sort of cross between the practical and romantic Rossetts,” said Guy.

They talked for a long time about their future plans.

When Isobel laid her head upon her pillow that night, she was happier than she had ever been since the day her dear old father died.

Chapter Fifteen

A week had passed since the conversation between Valerie Delmonte and Contraras had taken place. A great function was on at the Royal Palace to-night. All the élite of Madrid would be there.

For this special occasion, the leading members of the Spanish section had shifted from Fonterrabia to the capital – Zorrilta, Alvedero, Violet Hargrave, Andres Moreno. Contraras and Valerie Delmonte had already taken up their residence there. It was the night of the great *coup*, on the successful development of which depended the dawn of the new era.

Moreno had a busy day. Thanks to the noble-spirited action of Mademoiselle Delmonte, who had taken the entire execution of the *coup* upon herself, he was spared any active participation in it. Violet Hargrave, who had been originally named as an assistant, was also dispensed with.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, he was seated in the private room of the Head of the Spanish Secret Service. There was also present the Head of the Police. The three men talked together for a very considerable time. Moreno was attired in his shabby workman's garb; he had on also a false beard and moustache.

When the interview was terminated, Moreno rose; and turned to the Chief of Police.

“You have thought it all out then? You know she will come

with the Duchess del Pineda.”

“She will be watched from the moment she enters the Palace to the moment she leaves it,” was the chief’s confident reply.

“And you say that the Duchess is quite ignorant of her intentions?” It was the Chief of the Secret Service who spoke.

“I will swear to the innocence of the Duchess, also to that of the Duke. They are simply tools. They have been made use of by a superior intelligence, by a man who has a strong hold over the Duke.”

“I wish, Mr Moreno, you were able to take us a little more into your confidence. Would it not be possible to bag the whole lot to-night?”

The Chief of the Police rubbed his hands at the thought. “Ah, that would be a fine idea. And I suppose, Mr Moreno, you have it in your power to enable us to do so?”

“Gently, gentlemen, if you please. Don’t be ungrateful. I am helping you somewhat to-night. And because I am doing this, you want to rush things,” answered the young journalist in his usual quiet way. “Now, look you, much as I desire to serve you, I have a very tender regard for my own skin.”

“Naturally,” cried the Secret Service man. And the Chief of Police echoed him.

“The secret of this project to-night has been entrusted to a good many people,” continued Moreno. “If it fails, as you promise me it will fail, two things will occur to the mind of the Chief – one that the brotherhood has been betrayed by one

in their counsels, the other that your spies noticed something suspicious in the behaviour of the woman, and that she was arrested on the strength of that suspicious behaviour.”

The two men nodded their heads. They began to see the drift of his observations.

“I was at first designed to take part in this project, but the original programme was altered. Had it been adhered to, I think I could have enabled you to bag the whole lot, at any rate, most of them, and yet escaped scot free myself, of course with your co-operation.”

“We dare not ask you to disclose your plan?” insinuated the Secret Service man gently.

Moreno shook his head. “I think not. But if this *coup* fails, there will be another planned shortly. By that time my ideas will be perfected, and I trust I shall be able to do what you want, and escape with a whole skin. Only one member of the brotherhood will be here to-night. The others are scattered about. Suspicion would at once fall upon me if every one except myself were taken.”

“We could work that out pretty easily, could we not?” queried the Chief of Police eagerly.

“I think not,” was Moreno’s answer. “You would have got this lot out of the way, but there are a few members of the brotherhood left in London, and every man has a knife handy. I must show a clean sheet to those who remain at large. Please trust me, and I will shortly do it in my own way.”

Moreno left after cordial hand-shaking. Both the Chiefs were men of considerable astuteness, and great experience. But they agreed that there was a certain subtlety about this young man, a certain suggestion of strength and confidence, that won their admiration.

Moreno perhaps did not repose quite so much confidence in them as they did in himself.

“I hope to heaven they won’t bungle it at the last minute,” he said to himself as he walked along. “If I were dealing with the French police, I shouldn’t have a doubt.”

He walked down the Puerta del Sol, past the Grand Hotel de la Paix. He saw the tall form of Contraras enter the vestibule. He shrugged his shoulders, and a look of regret stole over his face.

“He is going to hearten her up for this night’s work, the old devil, while he stands safely outside, and looks on. Poor little woman! I wish I could save her. But how can you save a fanatic?” So ran his thoughts. “Why in the name of wonder does a woman who has got everything in the world she requires want to mix herself up with this wretched and bloodthirsty crew? She must lie on the bed she has made, and it will be a pretty hard one, I should wager.”

Moreno walked swiftly in the direction of a poor quarter of the town. He entered the humble abode of an inferior member of the Spanish Secret Service, where he doffed his working-man’s garb and assumed his ordinary clothes.

Later on, he saw Violet Hargrave, who was living close to him.

Violet seemed very restless and perturbed. "This is the great night," she said by way of greeting. "I wonder if it will come off all right."

"I should say there is every chance it will, unless Valerie's nerve fails her at the last moment," was Moreno's diplomatic answer.

Mrs Hargrave gave a little shudder. Her pretty delicate face went a shade paler.

"I cannot help feeling glad that I wasn't brought into it."

Moreno bent upon her his keen glance. "And yet I should not put you down as a very tender-hearted person."

"I don't know that I am, or should be under certain circumstances. But I have no grudge against these people, no particular wrong to avenge. Aren't you really glad you are out of it?"

"I suppose, in a way, I am. Still, one feels a bit of a coward in letting Valerie take all the risk. It seems taking advantage of her bravery, to snatch at the chance of avoiding all danger for oneself."

"I shall sit up very late, on the chance of hearing the news."

"On the contrary, I think I shall go to bed early," said Moreno. "We shall hear nothing to-night in this distant quarter. And in the morning there will be the news, or no news at all. The Chief will let us know."

The great Contraras, very upright and vigorous for his age, was shown into Mademoiselle Delmonte's sitting-room. She sprang

up eagerly at his entrance.

“I am so glad you have come. You are a little late, are you not? Luncheon will be served in a few moments.”

He could see she was very restless, and her cheeks were pale; there was a strange, almost unnatural brilliance in her dark eyes. Her voice was jerky.

He took both her hands in his and pressed them tenderly. “You are not afraid, Valerie?”

He was a fanatic, bold, brutal, and ruthless in his fanaticism, ready to sacrifice anything and everybody to the one absorbing idea. But at the sight of those pale cheeks, that quivering mouth, a momentary regret assailed him. He was a father, and this beautiful young woman was young enough to be his daughter.

“We ought to have had a man for this job,” he said, speaking a little hoarsely. “But you know you chose it yourself; you would not even have another associated with you.”

“I know.” She tried to laugh lightly, but there was a quaver in the laugh. “I do not regret. I am not really afraid. But I suppose every soldier on his first battlefield has inward tremors that he cannot repress. I am a soldier of the Revolution, and to-night is my first battlefield.”

“And you feel those tremors, eh?”

“Just a little, although I blush for them. But don’t let us think of this. Ah, here comes lunch.” They sat down to the meal. She was a very abstemious woman, and rarely partook of stimulants. But, in honour of Contraras’ visit, she had ordered a bottle of

champagne. Under its exhilarating influence, her jangled nerves readjusted themselves, and she became her natural self. The colour returned to her cheeks.

She raised her glass and nodded to her guest.

“To the new world, born upon the ruins of the old.”

“Amen to that wish!” cried Contraras fervently, as he drank his wine in one long draught.

There was a long pause, which she broke abruptly. “I think I have told you I made my will in London last year.”

Contraras nodded. “Yes, you told me that.”

“But I did not tell you the details. I have left all my money in the hands of the Public Trustee, to divide amongst certain charities. As private fortunes go, it is a fair one – but what a small sum to go to the alleviation of this vast amount of human misery!”

“You could not have made a better use of it,” said Contraras appreciatively.

“To you, my dear friend, I have left twenty thousand pounds to devote to whatever purpose you think fit. Of course you will apply that money to the spreading of the propaganda.”

“I much appreciate your kind thought, my dear Valerie; it is just like you. But may the day be far distant when – ”

She raised her hand. “We will speak no more of that, please. I wonder what will be the result of to-night?”

“Success!” cried Contraras confidently. “Success!”

A few minutes later he rose to go.

“The Duchess will call for you in her carriage. Once arrived at the Palace, keep under her wing for some time, so as to avoid suspicion. Then seize your time and opportunity. Would you like me to come round and see you before you start? But I shall look out for you at the Palace.”

For a moment she did not answer him, she was pursuing the train of her own thoughts.

“I never told you I had my fortune told by a gipsy when I was sixteen. Would you like to know what she predicted?”

“If you wish,” replied Contraras politely. He had no respect for gipsies or their prophecies.

“Ah, I see it won’t interest you. I don’t think you believe much in the spiritual side of existence. Still, I will tell it; it will not take a moment. Up to the present, it has come remarkably true. This gipsy, she was a very old woman, predicted that I should have a very hard life for some years, then would come some years of great good fortune, and then – equally great tribulation.”

Contraras smiled. “My dear child, she probably predicted precisely the same things hundreds of times to her clients. The veil of the future is not to be lifted by a wandering beggar-woman.”

“Of course, I knew you would not be impressed, or perhaps you just say it to cheer me.”

She had forgotten his question – should he come and see her again before she started for the Palace? He repeated it.

“No, my good friend, I would rather not. If all goes well,

we shall meet again often. If not, we will say good-bye here. A thousand thanks for your friendship and kindness.”

Could fanaticism go further? She was thanking this hardened old schemer for his friendship and kindness – friendship and kindness that were ready to sacrifice her at any moment for his own ends.

Chapter Sixteen

Moreno had declared to Violet Hargrave that he proposed to go to bed early, and wait till to-morrow for the news.

When he spoke that had been his original intention. But, as the evening drew on, he began to feel a certain restlessness stirring in him. Certain things were about to happen, or, as he hoped, to be frustrated. He could hardly compose himself to sleep under the unusual circumstances. He would go out, and form one of the undistinguished crowd that clustered round the Palace gates. If anything dramatic happened, he could not fail to be aware of it. The news would spread like wildfire.

On his arrival, he caught sight of a woman closely veiled standing close beside him. He recognised her at once. It was evident that Mrs Hargrave could no more endure to stay indoors than he could.

He moved up a few paces and spoke to her in English, practically their native tongue.

“The same sudden impulse seized both of us,” he whispered. “Well, it is a very orderly crowd. I don’t think we shall be pushed or knocked about. We shall enjoy the sight of the grandees arriving. By the way, it is a pity we were not sent an invitation, then we could have seen it from the inside.”

Violet Hargrave whispered back. “I simply couldn’t stay indoors. My nerves seem on edge to-night.”

“Mine are a bit out of time, too,” answered Moreno in a low voice.

And, while they were waiting, Moreno indulged in several philosophical reflections.

A curious and not ill-natured crowd was gathered round the Palace, something like the throng that gathers round a wedding. There was no harm in these good-humoured, laughing persons, mainly of the lower order. They were not envious of the people who went inside, these men in Court costume, these women of another world, daintily attired. They discussed and admired the good looks of the men, the exquisite costumes of the women.

If the Court Chamberlain had suddenly appeared, and in the name of their Majesties, bade them enter the Royal precincts in a spirit of perfect equality with the other guests, they would have been very embarrassed and, save for a few adventurous spirits, have declined the invitation. They would have felt out of place.

From what causes arose this antagonism amongst the clever extremists of the proletariat toward the more fortunate ones of the earth?

Moreno was puzzled to find a solution. Envy perhaps was the contributing cause. And yet the ordinary man who dines at a common eating-house is not always envious of the man who eats a sumptuous luncheon at the Ritz or Carlton. The middle-class prosperous professional man does not always gnash his teeth when he thinks of a nobleman, possibly his client, who has a rent roll of a hundred thousand a year.

Moreno was very just. There was a time when he had had to fare very frugally, and he had not complained. Things had improved. When the fancy took him, he would indulge in a good dinner, a bottle of champagne, and an excellent cigar. Was he hurting the toiling millions very much if he occasionally indulged in these luxuries? Were the few fortunate ones of the earth, and after all they were very few, hurting him if they indulged in them every day?

Night was slowly settling over the city. Far away from this scene of revel and display, some thousands of humble workers had eaten their frugal suppers, and were preparing for bed. If all the money that was to be spent upon this function had been shared between them, would they have been much the richer? Champagne, excellent cigars, and good dinners could not be given to every creature on God's earth. That was an inexorable economic law, which no revolutionist could alter.

He was raised from his reveries by a light touch on his arm.

"Who are these two men?" It was Violet Hargrave who spoke. "Somehow, they look people of importance."

Moreno recognised them at once, as they drove slowly through – the Chief of the Secret Service, the Head of the Police. He was glad that they were on the scene early. They might not have quite the perfect methods of the corresponding French organisations, but perhaps they would justify themselves before the night was over.

"I don't know them from Adam, but, as you say, they certainly

look persons of importance, especially the fat one.”

Always suspicious, he wondered if Mrs Hargrave was trying to draw him, herself knowing who they were. Anyway, she had failed. He was not to be caught by a leading question like that.

Then presently she nudged him. “Look, look, the Chief!”

Yes, it was Contraras, driving in a humble cab. His fine, lined face showed clear against the waning light.

“Wonderful man! The brains of sixty, the fire and energy of twenty!” said Moreno glibly. He spoke with all the enthusiasm of a true son of the Revolution.

Mrs Hargrave made no comment. Equipage after equipage rolled up, containing fair women and brave men. The Palace was one blaze of light. The crowd grew closer, enjoying the spectacle of the arriving guests, and it seemed a crowd that was at once good-humoured and appreciative, if at times critical.

Moreno turned to his companion. “I say, it’s a bit of a shame that you and I are not inside instead of here, eh? I think Contraras might have worked that while he was about it.”

Mrs Hargrave smiled back; she was very attracted by this black-browed young Spaniard.

“My dear friend, under the new régime, we shall all go to Court.”

“To the Court of Contraras, I suppose?”

“Something of that sort,” answered Violet, letting herself go a little. “And Madame Contraras, more aristocratic than any queen, will smile condescendingly, and the pretty daughter will

turn up her nose at us.”

The conversation was getting dangerous. Mrs Hargrave must be checked in her impulsive moods, which, he honestly admitted, were very rare.

“Ah, if I could see dear old Contraras in that position I would die happy,” he exclaimed, with a splendid mendacity.

Mrs Hargrave stole a quiet glance at him.

“Yes, he is very wonderful, is he not? But I can’t honestly say I like his womenkind. They have no sympathy with his aspirations.”

As they were speaking, a very gorgeous carriage rolled up. It contained the Duchess del Pineda and Valerie Delmonte. The Duke had not accompanied them. He had pleaded indisposition, but probably prudence had dictated his absence. Anyway, if certain things happened, it would be possible for him to plead a successful *alibi*.

“Look, look!” cried Violet Hargrave, a little excitedly for her. “Valerie Delmonte!”

Moreno, the kindly-hearted, felt a spasm of pity as he gazed on the face of the handsome, fanatical young Frenchwoman, whom that wily old Contraras had subjugated to his evil will.

“Poor child!” he said aloud, for the benefit of his companion, “I can only hope she will not lose her nerve. It was a man’s job, but she would insist upon having it.”

There was a little lull in the procession of carriages. And then there drove up one conveying Guy Rossett and a colleague. The

Ambassador had already arrived, with his wife.

Moreno stole a glance at his companion. She was heavily veiled, but he could see that her face had grown pale, that a sad look had come into her eyes.

“Our admirable young diplomatist!” whispered the young man. “Well, Madrid is not a very safe place for him.”

“But he is in no danger to-night I take it?” came back the answer in a whisper as low as his own.

“I should say not. For the present, we have left him out of our calculations; we are flying at higher game. He will hardly come within the sphere of Valerie’s operations. His Chief may – I doubt even that.”

Mrs Hargrave made no comment. Presently Moreno spoke in the same low whisper.

“You have no great affection for Mr Rossett, I take it?”

“No, I have not any great affection for Mr Rossett.”

“And yet you were once very good friends.”

Mrs Hargrave stiffened a little. “You seem to know a great deal of my private affairs. Yes, we once were very good friends. He knew my husband long before I married him. I fancy I have told you that.”

Moreno was not to be daunted by her aloof attitude. He was never wanting in enterprise.

“I should not be surprised if, at the present moment, you hated him.”

“Perhaps you are right,” was the curt answer.

Moreno indulged in a quiet inward chuckle. If she had known that Isobel Clandon was established so close to her lover, that through his adroit manipulation of affairs they were meeting every day, her hatred must have expressed itself more heartily.

Valerie Delmonte, under the wing of the unsuspecting Duchess, was now within the Palace.

She had only once before looked upon a scene approaching this, and it had been much less brilliant.

Once, early in their married life, her husband had taken her to one of the President's receptions in Paris. It was easy, in his position, to secure the entrée for himself and wife.

She remembered that evening well. Never had she felt more humiliated. Half a dozen times kind old Monsieur Varenne had introduced her to some of his acquaintances. There was a formal bow interchanged, and nothing beyond; one and all they had sheered off. Even in a republican and democratic country, these purse-proud citizens would have nothing to do with the girl who had come from the music halls.

She recalled how, when she had reached home that night, she had burst into a fit of wild sobbing, and her kindly, elderly husband had tried to comfort her.

"Calm thyself, *ma chérie*, we will not go to these hateful places again. We will lead our own life."

To-night, how different. A Court, one of the oldest in Europe, reflecting that atmosphere of pomp and state associated with long descended Royalty. The kindly young King, his British-

born Queen, chatting graciously with their favoured guests. Men in resplendent uniforms and orders, great ladies of the highest Spanish nobility, what a contrast to the homely reception of the President in those far-off days!

Then she had been escorted by a very wealthy but somewhat shady financier, whose influence had not been sufficient to enable her to scale the social heights to which she had aspired.

To-night she was under the wing of a popular chaperon, in whose veins ran the proudest blood of Spain. The Duchess, acting according to instructions, introduced her to everybody she came across.

Mademoiselle Delmonte, handsome, brilliant, and vivacious, was an immediate success. This aristocratic assemblage, ignorant of her antecedents, only recognising that she was under the wing of the popular Duchess, took her at her real valuation.

Being a woman, she was naturally pleased with her momentary success. But she was sensible enough to know to what she owed it. If these people who were flattering her now had known of her lowly origin, how she had graduated through the circus and the music hall to the possession of wealth, they would have turned their backs on her, as the purse-proud parvenus had done in the democratic salons of the French President.

These bitter reflections rather tended to harden than soften her resolution. To-night she was an avenging angel, bent upon the task of making these insolent people atone for the insults heaped upon the lowly-born.

Once in her triumphant progress she came near to Contraras, who was standing alone, surveying the brilliant scene with his keen, deep-set eyes.

She disengaged herself from the arm of her companion, a handsome young man of some standing in Spanish Society.

“Excuse me a moment. I see an old friend, to whom I must say a few words.”

“What do you think of it all?” she whispered, as she held out her hand.

“What I have always thought of such spectacles as these,” he whispered back. “These besotted creatures feast and dance and make merry, without a thought of their oppressed and toiling fellow-creatures.” He spoke intensely, in the most bitter spirit of his gloomy fanaticism.

She could not linger, “My nerves are in perfect order,” she assured him as she turned away. He smiled kindly at her as she passed on.

The amiable and innocent Duchess had performed the duties of chaperon so well, had introduced her to so many people, that it was a long time before Valerie could shake herself free. It was a very crowded assemblage. If she could once break away, she would be free to roam where she pleased.

The moment came at last, close upon midnight. She was alone and mistress of her own movements. Her thoughts were no longer distracted by the idle chatter of some companion forced upon her.

Slowly, she edged her way towards the Royal circle. Progress was a little difficult, but at last she stood within a few feet of the King and Queen. She stood for a few moments, perhaps summoning up her courage. Then her hand stole towards her pocket.

Before she could reach it, a little cordon was formed round her, a cordon of six men in ordinary evening dress. The hand of one of the men gripped hers, and held it in a grasp of iron.

“Come quietly, mademoiselle,” whispered a voice in her ear. “We have followed you round all the evening, we fancied there was something suspicious about you. We may, of course, be mistaken, but in these troublous times we have to be very careful. We will take you to a private room, and have you searched. Of course, if nothing is found upon you, you will go free, and we will make you handsome amends.”

Valerie gave a little choking sob. The gipsy’s prophesy had come true – several years of hard life, a few years of good fortune, and then great tribulation.

“I came here with the Duchess del Pineda,” she said in a broken voice, hardly knowing what she was saying. “Do you dare to suspect – ”

It was the Head of the Police who held her wrist in that iron grasp. He spoke in a suave voice.

“Mademoiselle, we always suspect in our profession. For the Duchess del Pineda I have the highest respect. Will you consent to come quietly? If we are in the wrong, you have nothing to

fear.”

She turned with them without a word. She had failed miserably. The upholders of law and order had scored signally over the scattered and imperfect organisation of the brotherhood.

Between them, she walked through the long, brilliantly-lit rooms. The Chief of Police tucked her arm under his, keeping a tight hold on her wrist. The other five men accompanied them. There was nothing in the general attitude to suggest that she was not a very charming woman being escorted by a bevy of admirers.

Contraras was standing by the door as the procession passed out. Agitated as she was, she saw him, and flashed at him an agonised glance.

He flashed back at her a glance equally eloquent. He knew the Chief of Police by sight, and he understood what had happened. Poor little Valerie had failed! They would take her to some room, and search her. In her pocket they would find those cunning little bombs that, once launched, would have sent tyrants and oppressors hurling into space, and proclaimed the dawn of the new era.

Poor little Valerie! His eyes grew misty. As she had failed, it would have been better if he had left her alone. If ever he felt remorse in his life, he felt it that night.

His first impulse was to leave the Palace at once. But wiser thoughts prevailed. The Chief of Police had recognised him, he was sure. If he left immediately, it might give cause for suspicion.

Valerie had failed. For the moment the Cause had suffered a set-back. But his resolution was still undaunted, his brain still active. Because he had failed to-day, it did not follow that he would not be successful to-morrow.

He sought out the Duchess del Pineda, who was, as usual, surrounded by a group of chattering friends.

“Good evening, Duchess. What has become of our young friend, Mademoiselle Delmonte?”

“I really cannot tell you. She broke away from me a long time ago. She has been a tremendous success, I can assure you. I hope she intends to make a long stay in Madrid. She will be most popular.”

“I really cannot tell you. I know nothing of her plans,” answered Contraras in his grave, quiet tones. “As I told the Duke, I met her in France and England, where she appeared to move in the best circles.”

“Naturally,” said the innocent Duchess. Nobody would suspect the highly respected Contraras of telling a deliberate lie.

Outside the Palace, the crowd had thinned, but Moreno and Violet Hargrave still waited. Midnight had struck and all was quiet. There were no signs that heralded the happening of a tragedy. A few belated arrivals passed through to the Palace. The crowd began to melt away.

And then there was a little stir. A carriage drove up outside the Palace doors. Two men and a woman stepped into it, the woman was in evening dress.

The carriage passed the two watchers. Mrs Hargrave peered into the slowly-moving vehicle.

“Valerie Delmonte,” she whispered excitedly. “There is a man sitting beside her, one of those two men I noticed driving in – don’t you remember I said they looked people of importance, and you said you did not know them from Adam. What does it mean? Valerie alone with those men?”

“It looks as if the *coup* had failed,” replied Moreno quietly. “I should say that Valerie has been caught, and those two men are members of the police.”

Mrs Hargrave grew a little hysterical. “Thank God, it was not myself,” she added, after a pause. “I am glad it was not you.”

Moreno was about to reply when another carriage drove through, the occupant of which was Contraras. His tall form seemed huddled up; he was evidently in a state of extreme dejection.

Moreno tucked Mrs Hargrave’s arm under his own.

“Come along! Evidently the *coup* has failed; the police have been one too many for us. Valerie Delmonte going away with those two men, poor old Contraras huddled up in that carriage, his attitude expressing that all is lost, at any rate, for the moment! We have nothing to wait for. We shall hear all about it to-morrow.”

They walked along arm in arm, both occupied with their own thoughts. Mrs Hargrave broke the long silence.

“He is a wonderful man. If he is dejected to-night, he will

be full of energy and vigour to-morrow.” Moreno agreed. “Yes, he will think of more *coups*. I suppose the next one will be the removal of Mr Rossett.”

Violet made no answer immediately. Then, presently she said. “I fancy he is considered a rather dangerous person from our point of view.” Moreno shrugged his shoulders. “And yet I fancy his removal would not greatly hasten the new era, do you? He is really a quite insignificant person. If Valerie had brought it off to-night, well and good – but I must confess these minor developments don’t interest me greatly. Do they interest you?”

“A little, I think,” answered Mrs Hargrave, in a somewhat faint voice.

Moreno looked at her steadfastly. Her nerves were a bit out of order to-night. That long vigil outside the Palace had told on them – that waiting for the crash of the bombs which Valerie Delmonte had carried in her pocket, the bombs which now had been appropriated by the Chief of Police.

He gave her arm a tender pressure. “I believe at bottom you are really a womanly woman. The end justifies the means, of course, but some of the means are very bloodthirsty, don’t you think?”

“I thought so to-night, when I was waiting to hear the crash of those devilish, cunning little bombs, the latest invention of science, as our good old Contraras assures us.”

Moreno pulled himself up; perhaps he had been a little too frank. But he knew that the photographed letter always gave him the whip-hand of Violet Hargrave.

“Still, we must not be squeamish. Revolutions are not made with rose-water, and you must break eggs to make omelettes.”

“Absolutely true.” Mrs Hargrave, looking provokingly pretty under her veil, sighed a soft assent to these platitudes. He fancied her arm gave a responsive pressure to his.

When he went to bed that night, Moreno was disturbed with remorseful thoughts of Valerie Delmonte. If the Chief of Police had found those bombs in her pocket, it was he who had told that somewhat slow-moving official he would find them there.

Then he comforted himself. If he had betrayed Valerie, he had prevented her from hurling to destruction a dozen or more innocent people. His conscience was quite clear. If she had been a very ugly woman, instead of a very pretty one, perhaps his conscience might not have been troubled at all.

“I didn’t think much of that Chief of Police at first,” he murmured drowsily, as he turned on his pillow. “But he seems to have managed it all right. Still, on the whole, I would rather deal with Scotland Yard, or the Sûreté in Paris.”

Chapter Seventeen

Lord Saxham and his daughter had left Ticehurst Park. They were in their town house in Belgrave Square. They were neither of them very fond of London.

The Earl, in his youth and middle age, had experienced all the fleeting joys of the Metropolis. Mary, after the experience of her unfortunate love-affair, had definitely resolved that she would retire into a convent and devote herself to good works as soon as her father died.

Belgrave Square was even a little duller than Ticehurst Park. They were in the midst of a crowd that had forgotten them.

Lord Saxham was, to put it vulgarly, a back number, and was quite out of the modern whirl. Lady Mary, during her brief season, had fallen head over ears in love with the handsome young Guardsman, and had buried her heart in his grave.

The only thing that had drawn them up from the sylvan shades of Ticehurst Park was this – they wanted to be near Greatorex, that they could know what was happening to Guy at first hand.

The eldest son of the house. Viscount Ticehurst, dropped in occasionally, and deigned to spare them a few moments of his valuable time. As a matter of fact, at the present moment he was occupied with a particularly pretty chorus-girl, whom he was half inclined to marry.

Mary was fond of both her brothers, but she recognised the

difference in them. Eric was as weak as water and destitute of brains. He was capable of marrying any chorus-girl on the sly, and then rushing her down home and presenting her as his wife, to the terrible consternation of his poor old father, who thought that people should always marry in their own class.

Guy was different – there was just a little bit of common sense in him. He had fallen violently in love with Isobel Clandon – a girl not quite in his own world, from the Earl’s point of view – but a sweet and lovable girl, and above all a lady.

And Guy had waited for the parental consent, which had been wrung under somewhat false pretences. But he had been content to wait until his future wife would be received under proper auspices. He would not rush her down and take his father by storm, as Ticehurst would do when the time came for him to present his chorus-girl to a justly offended parent.

Father and daughter sat at luncheon in the dining-room of the house in Belgrave Square.

Very terribly did Lady Mary miss her beautiful gardens, her flowers, her dogs, her aviary of little songsters. She was essentially a country girl. She hated any city, with its cramped and narrow streets. Even Paris had no attractions for her. Vienna and Berlin left her cold.

“You have seen Greatorex this morning, father?” she questioned when the servants had withdrawn.

Lord Saxham frowned. He had realised, in this his latest visit to the Metropolis, that he was a back number. He remembered

the years long ago when he was the most golden of the gilded youth. Then his name was one to conjure with. He led the revels; if it pleased him, he painted the town red. Now, except for a few ancient cronies, nobody recognised him.

“Yes, I saw Greatorex,” he answered gloomily. “He was always as close as wax. He is closer than ever. He comes of an infernally close family. That family has never been anything great.” He was getting into his explosive vein. “Always underlings and jackals – always content to serve.”

“What did he say about Guy?” asked Mary softly.

“Only that he was quite happy and well. He did vouchsafe to volunteer the information that some great anarchist *coup* had failed.”

“Well, that was about as much as you could expect,” said Mary in her quiet, gentle tones. “He is not going to give information to everybody.”

“To everybody?” spluttered the Earl, in his most fiery mood. “Am I everybody? I have supported this Government through thick and thin. I have backed them up through everything. Why do they withhold their confidence from me, at this important moment?”

Lady Mary used all her *finesse*. She knew too well why Greatorex did not trust him. He was an open sieve. All news would filter through him in five minutes, at all his clubs, to the first acquaintance he met.

“You must not blame Greatorex, dear; he carries a very

heavy burden. He dare not give an incautious confidence, drop a random word.”

“But why this reticence to me, of all people?” thundered Lord Saxham, in his most indignant tones. “Am I not the soul of discretion? Should I betray a confidence?”

Mary made no answer. She knew her father well. Privately he was the soul of honour. He would not betray a confidence wilfully. But he was loose of speech, and he was quite vain. He would drop a few hints, perhaps unconsciously, from which attentive listeners might gather much.

She let the stormy ebullition pass. Then she spoke.

“I wish we could hear some really authentic news of dear old Guy.”

The Earl grunted.

“You hear daily from Isobel?”

“Of course, but Isobel is a woman. She tells me what she is allowed to know. Because she is a woman, Guy and Moreno keep everything from her. They make out the path is strewn with roses. They will not tell her the truth, for fear of frightening her.”

“Then where are you going to get your information from?” asked the Earl querulously.

There was a long pause. When she spoke, a faint colour dyed Lady Mary’s cheek.

“I wonder if that young barrister would know anything; I almost forget his name – you remember, Isobel’s cousin who came down to Ticehurst and arranged her journey to Spain. Yes,

I remember, Maurice Farquhar. He is a bosom friend of that Spanish man, Moreno, who, I fancy, is trying his best to defeat the anarchists.”

The Earl was, fortunately, very unobservant to-day.

“Yes, I remember him quite well, a perfectly decent sort of young fellow. A rather forlorn hope, eh?”

The flush had died away from Mary’s cheek. She had regained her self-control. She spoke quite calmly.

“Yes, I agree, but drowning people catch at a straw. Let me ask him to dinner, and find out if he knows anything.”

Lord Saxham was certainly in his most benignant mood.

“By all means. He might be useful.”

Lady Mary wrote a note to Farquhar, addressed to his chambers in the Temple. It was a somewhat formal letter – when she put pen to paper, Mary was always formal – inviting him to dine in Belgrave Square.

Farquhar’s first impulse was to refuse. He had no wish to mingle with the aristocracy on unequal terms. When he became Lord Chancellor, it would be a different matter.

Then he thought of Lady Mary’s winsome appearance, and he altered his mind. He sent a note accepting the invitation. But of course he knew why he was being asked. They wanted to know if he could give any reliable information about Guy Rossett.

He presented himself at Belgrave Square on the tick of the clock. Not for him the *mauvais quart d’heure* consecrated to meaningless conversation in the drawing-room.

Lord Saxham shook him kindly by the hand. Lady Mary was graciousness itself. Could she ever be anything but kind, even if there was, at the back, a little subtle feminine diplomacy.

It was a party of three, waited on in solemn state by the butler and two footmen. There was not even a fourth to make matters even. Farquhar smiled inwardly. These two guileless persons, father and daughter, must have desired his company exceedingly! Well, he would learn all about it later on.

The servants had withdrawn. The men smoked. Lady Mary did not leave the room. It was an informal party. Farquhar puffed leisurely at his cigar. He was awaiting developments.

Saxham opened the ball. He was a most undisciplined person. He was always like a bull in a china shop, charging with blind fury.

“It’s about Guy, we’re awfully anxious, you know,” he said in his loud, resonant tones. “I wonder if you can help us at all. My daughter and Isobel tell me you are a great friend of Moreno.”

Beneath his somewhat pachydermatous exterior; Farquhar had a certain vein of sensitiveness. He was now sure of what he had suspected. He had been asked to dine for the purposes of being pumped for the information he could or could not give them. Lord Saxham, in his blunt, vulgar fashion, had so unsuccessfully masked his hospitality. Then he caught Lady Mary’s pleading, almost shamefaced glance.

“I can quite guess what is in your mind, Mr Farquhar, but I beg you to forgive our anxiety. We are very pleased to see you

here for your own sake. If you can help us with Guy, we shall be doubly pleased.”

She leaned across, and said, in a whisper that did not reach Lord Saxham’s ears, dulled with age:

“My father will, unfortunately, always take the lead, but he is not always happy in his way of expressing himself.”

The rather stiff-backed young lawyer forgot his momentary resentment under the kind words of this charming young woman who could so graciously pour oil on the troubled waters.

“Please, Lady Mary, tell me in what way I can serve you.” There was no stiffness in his tones.

Lord Saxham had subsided now. He gathered, in a dim sort of way, that he had put his foot in it, for about the thousandth time in his long career. He was going to leave it all to his capable daughter.

Mary drew her chair closer to the guest. Lord Saxham, for the moment, was out of the picture. Besides, he was nodding over his second glass of port. It was better so, he was now incapable of mischief.

Mary put her cards frankly on the table.

“As I told you just now, we are very pleased to see you for yourself, as a cousin of dear Isobel, at least *I* am certainly very pleased.” A faint colour suffused her cheek.

Farquhar bowed. No barrister can blush, but into his rather cold eyes there came a softer light which might be taken to express emotion.

“Lady Mary, I am certain you are not a woman who would ever say anything you did not mean.”

“Of course, there was an ulterior motive,” continued Mary, with her usual frankness. The flush on her cheek had not quite died away; it had rather been revived by a compliment that she felt was meant to be sincere.

“There was an ulterior motive, as I have candidly admitted. We are very anxious about Guy. Greatorex will tell us nothing, my father has been to him this morning, and he keeps his mouth shut. We hear nothing from Guy, of course, he does not wish to alarm us. Isobel writes short, chatty letters; naturally Guy does not tell her anything; she knows no more than we do. The question is, Mr Farquhar, do you know anything? You can easily understand how anxious we are.”

Farquhar smoked on steadily. It was some time before he spoke. Lord Saxham was now slumbering peacefully after his heavy dinner and his third glass of port. He looked just a little contemptuously at the somnolent figure. At Lord Saxham’s age, he expected to be Lord Chancellor, alert and vigorous.

When he spoke, he did not answer her question. Rather, he pursued the train of his own thoughts.

“It seems to me. Lady Mary,” he said, speaking very softly, so that he should not disturb the slumbers of his host, “that in a measure you bear upon your shoulders – very capable shoulders, I will admit – the entire burden of your family.” Mary protested feebly. “Oh, no, don’t think that for a moment. My father is very

vigorous as a rule. Eric is quite a nice boy, just a little wild, perhaps. And Guy has got lots of grit; he will make good yet. I cannot thank Isobel enough for teaching us how cowardly we were for wanting to have him recalled."

"Isobel has tons of grit," said Farquhar shortly. "She comes from a fighting line."

"Yes, Isobel, as you say, has tons of grit." Lady Mary looked at him curiously. "You are very fond of your cousin, are you not, Mr Farquhar?"

"I am very fond of Isobel," said the young barrister quietly. "We were brought up as children together. I was a few years her senior. I used to carry her about as a little child."

Mary looked at him again, and for a second time a faint flush dyed her fair cheek.

"Will you think it very impertinent of me, Mr Farquhar, if I suggest that you were very much in love with your pretty cousin?"

Farquhar shook his head. "I don't deny it for a moment. I was very much in love with Isobel. I always wanted her for my wife, but the consideration of ways and means prevented. When I did ask her, I learned that she had accepted your brother – "

"And you are still in love with her?" questioned Mary, a little eagerly.

"It is no use being in love with a girl who is betrothed to another man. It is one of those vain dreams that a sensible man dismisses. Isobel Clandon is to me now a dear cousin, a good friend." Somehow, Lady Mary looked relieved. She spoke lightly.

“You will get over it, and one day you will marry. And when you are Lord Chancellor, your wife will be the first female subject in the kingdom.”

“And Isobel will be the wife of an Ambassador,” said Farquhar. “We shall run each other close, shall we not?”

Mary laughed. “Oh, Guy will never have stamina enough to become an Ambassador. When he comes into dear old Aunt Henrietta’s money, he will throw it all over, and lead his pleasant old idle life. I know Guy too well.”

“Don’t you think Isobel will put grit into him?”

“Isobel is a loving woman. She will always see eye to eye with Guy. Whatever he determines, she will acquiesce in.”

Farquhar sighed. Ambition was always with him the dominating note. He regretted its absence in others.

“A pity,” he said. “With your family influence, he might go far.”

“He doesn’t want to go far, Mr Farquhar,” she whispered. She pointed at the slumbering figure of Lord Saxham. “My father has plenty of brains; if he had worked, he might have been Prime Minister, or very near it. In the Rossett family, there is a certain amount of grit, but not quite enough to bring them to the foremost place.”

Farquhar leaned across the table. This was certainly one of the most charming women he had ever met.

“I say, Lady Mary, what a pity you are not a man. If you had been, I am sure you would have put the Rossett family in their

right place.” He cast a cautious glance at the still slumbering host.

Lady Mary smiled pleasantly. She was not ill-pleased with the genuine compliment.

“Yes, perhaps, if I had been born a man. I should certainly have been better than Eric, perhaps a shade better than Guy.” She broke off suddenly. “But it is idle to talk of these things. I am a woman, and must be contented with my lot, my humble sphere. Now, can you tell me anything of my brother?”

“You want me to tell you the truth, and you will not be afraid to hear it?”

“No, I shall not be afraid.” She spoke very bravely, but he noticed that her hands were trembling.

“I had a letter from Moreno this morning. He tells me that the design against your brother has temporarily dropped into abeyance. They had a very great *coup* on – that has failed. He has reason to suspect that they will now turn their attention to Mr Rossett.”

The tears coursed slowly down Mary’s face. The Earl slumbered on peacefully.

Then she raised her head. Her eyes flashed. She looked angrily at her sleeping father.

“Oh, our poor Guy. And it is his fault,” – she pointed at the somnolent Earl – “his fault entirely. He wanted to separate him from Isobel, because he thought she was not good enough for him. He went to Greatorex, and with his influence he got this post at Madrid – and he has sent him to his death.” Farquhar felt very

sympathetic. No man can very properly appreciate his successful rival. But he was forced to admit that there was something in Guy Rossett that appealed alike to men and women.

“Now listen, Lady Mary! Moreno tells me a lot, because to a certain extent I have been in it from the beginning. I won’t bore you with details. Anyway, Moreno says he is quite certain he can save your brother. Perhaps Moreno may be a little too cocksure, he is a very vain sort of fellow. He goes so far as to hint that he might require my assistance.”

Mary looked puzzled. “Your assistance! But where do you come in, in this awful mix-up?”

“It is perhaps a little difficult to explain.” It was one of the few occasions in his life on which the self-possessed young barrister had felt embarrassed. “It is, perhaps, a little difficult to explain,” he repeated. “Moreno and I are very old friends. He was one night in my chambers. He extracted a promise from me that, if he called upon me, I would help your brother.”

Mary shot at him a swift and penetrating glance. “I can understand, Mr Farquhar, that you and Mr Moreno are old friends, that you owe many a good turn to one another. But my brother is nothing to you. Why should you put yourself out of the way for him?”

Farquhar temporised. “One sometimes gives promises rather rashly, Lady Mary.”

There was a long pause before the woman spoke.

“I think I can understand,” she said. “You gave that promise

not because you cared for my brother, but because you wanted to help Isobel Clandon.”

Farquhar did not beat about the bush. “Yes, I wanted to help Isobel. Naturally, I do not love your brother, but she loves him. And her happiness is my first consideration.”

Mary looked at him with her soft, kindly eyes. “I think of all the lovers I have heard or read of, you are the truest,” she said, “and also the kindest. If our positions had been reversed, I rather doubt if I could have done that.”

But Farquhar shook his head. “Oh, you are one of God’s good women. In any situation you would act a thousand times better than I should.”

Suddenly the somnolent Earl woke up, in full possession of his faculties.

“Well, Farquhar, what do you know about Guy?” He took the matter up from the point where it had been left in abeyance.

Farquhar explained patiently that, in his opinion, Guy Rossett was in a position of considerable danger.

Naturally, at this point, Lord Saxham went off at a violent tangent.

“Then why the devil doesn’t Greatorex recall him, as I have begged him to do. Good heavens! I have been supporting this wretched Government through thick and thin. Can’t they grant me this little favour? My poor boy! He doesn’t want their infernal promotion. He will inherit a big fortune from his great-aunt. He can snap his fingers at Greatorex and the rest of them.”

Suddenly he began to sob, and buried his head in his hands. "My poor murdered boy," he moaned. "And Greatorex sent him to his death."

Farquhar smoked on stolidly. He did not feel greatly attracted towards his host. Lady Mary shot a somewhat contemptuous glance at her penitent parent, who was seeking to throw the blame on Greatorex.

"Pay no attention to him," she whispered across the table. "The Foreign Office is not to blame. He got Guy transferred abroad in order to separate him from Isobel. I have told you."

Farquhar understood and nodded. He had already come to the conclusion that Lord Saxham was a very poor and weak creature – not a good specimen of his order. How had he become possessed of such a daughter, so gentle, so high-minded? There must have been some virility on the female side of the family.

He drove back to his chambers in a rather exhilarated frame of mind. Lady Mary was very charming. He had quite got over that first feeling that he was to be exploited for the benefit of the Rossett family. Mary had put that all right, in her gentle, persuasive way. She had expressly laid emphasis on the fact that she, at any rate, was pleased to welcome him for himself.

He dismissed his taxi, and climbed up the steep stairs to his suite of rooms in one of the most cloistered courts of the Temple. To his surprise, the light in the hall was burning.

What had happened? He went into the dining-room, a blaze of electric light.

Stretched on the sofa, puffing at a long cigar, was Andres Moreno, awaiting his arrival.

“The devil!” cried Farquhar shortly, sharply, and decisively. Moreno waved a genial hand.

“Not exactly, old man, but one of his ambassadors. I say, I suppose you can give me a shake-down.”

“Of course, but why are you here? Why are you not in Spain?”

“All will be unfolded in good time, my boy. But what about a drink? I could do with one.”

“You know where the things are. Surely you could have helped yourself?” said Farquhar.

“Never care to drink alone, old man. By the way, I see you are in evening togs. Have you been dining with the aristocracy?”

“You’ve just hit it,” replied Farquhar, as he went to the sideboard and fetched out a decanter of whiskey. “I have been dining in Belgrave Square with the Earl of Saxham and his daughter. Lady Mary Rossett.”

“Good heavens, this might be called a coincidence,” cried Moreno, as he drained the refreshing draught offered to him.

Farquhar was rather impatient at any exhibition of humour. He frowned a little.

“Now, Moreno, out with it. What has brought you here? I am delighted to see you, of course, but you have not come all this long journey for nothing.”

But Moreno was still in high spirits that were not to be abruptly quenched.

“What a splendid Lord Chancellor you will make, always with both eyes on the practical, intolerant of anything that disturbs the even course of justice. Perfect embodiment of the legal mind. *À votre santé, mon ami!*” He drained his glass.

Farquhar looked at him critically. “You’re a bit of an ass to-night, aren’t you?”

“Not at all, most noble Festus. Never was I saner than I am at the present hour. Well, perhaps just at the moment I am suffering a little from swollen head. I, the poor Fleet Street journalist – you remember, Farquhar, how they used to despise me in the early days – have outwitted the keenest brains of the anarchists. I have made abortive their great *coup*.”

“I know,” said Farquhar generously. “My hearty congratulations, old man. But still, you have not come all this way to tell me that. You have something behind.”

Moreno’s manner changed at once. He sat down in an easy chair and became the solemn and grave personage who had important interests at stake.

“You remember an interview in these chambers a little time ago, when you gave me a certain promise?”

Farquhar remembered the incident well.

“Yes, I gave you a certain promise. You have come to remind me of it?”

“Are you overwhelmed with briefs?”

“I cannot exactly say I am overwhelmed with them, but I have enough to keep me going.”

“I see,” said Moreno quietly. He had cast aside his gay and chaffing mood; he was quite serious. “Can you depute those to somebody?”

“If it were imperative, I could.”

Moreno rose and laid his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Good! Then I claim your promise. Pack your bag to-morrow morning and come with me to Spain. I am going to outwit them again. I might do it single-handed, but your assistance will be invaluable. Will you come?”

“It is to help Guy Rossett?”

“It is to help Isobel Clandon through Guy Rossett. I will explain everything as we travel together to-morrow.”

“I adhere to my promise,” said Farquhar. “I will make all my arrangements in the morning. I shall be at your disposal after twelve. How long will you want me for?”

“A week at the outside.”

Moreno stifled a yawn. In spite of his vigorous constitution, he was very tired.

“Let us turn in, old man. I feel as if I could sleep the clock round.”

Chapter Eighteen

Contraras paid a flying visit to London. It was a secret visit, that is to say he stayed in an obscure hotel in the East of London, not venturing to his house in Fitzjohn's Avenue. His wife and daughter believed him to be still in Spain, from where he wrote letters to them at irregular intervals. He was far too busy to attend closely to domestic correspondence.

Moreover, like many great reformers, he had little in common with his family. His wife openly sneered at his doctrines; privately she thought he was a hypocrite who lacked the courage to practise what he preached, to lead the simple life which he was inculcating upon others. Their only child fully endorsed the mother's sentiments.

Moreover, she was in love with a young man who had been attracted to her by the report of her father's wealth. He was a poor cadet of an old and aristocratic family, and conservative to the backbone. The slightest word of this somewhat empty-headed young man outweighed the most profound arguments of the intellectual Contraras.

She was very dissatisfied with her parent, with what she considered his nonsensical theories of perfect equality. Miss Contraras was quite content to take the world as she found it. She did not trouble her head about the woes of the humbler classes. As long as she could live softly and have plenty of new frocks,

she was happy. Why should people with brains trouble to keep those who could not keep themselves?

Contraras came over to be present at a special meeting of the English section of the brotherhood, held, as usual, at Maceda's restaurant. The great *coup* had failed, but he was still undaunted, still full of resolution.

There were only about half a dozen choice spirits present. Maceda, for this special occasion, had delegated to his manager the task of looking after his comfortable little establishment.

Both Luçue and the restaurant keeper greeted their Chief with a sorrowful air. Maceda voiced their mutual sentiments.

"The iron must have entered into your soul, comrade. So near to success, and then to fail. And then, the fate of poor Valerie, so bright, so clever, so full of enthusiasm for the cause!"

The leader's voice broke a little as he answered: "Alas, poor Valerie – a fate worse than death. How she will eat out that brave heart of hers in their loathsome dungeons!"

He passed his hand across his brow, as if in that action he was trying to brush away a painful reminiscence. But the next moment he was again the man of action, of indomitable resolve.

"I think never again will I sanction the use of women in enterprises of this character, however willing they may be to take the risk and pay the penalty of failure. And now to our immediate business. How are things progressing in this country?"

Both Luçue and Maceda, but especially the former, who had only the business of the propaganda to attend to, gave him a most

encouraging report.

There was great dissatisfaction amongst the masses, a growing hatred of the class that neither toils nor spins. Many of the most influential leaders were in secret sympathy with their doctrines, and only waited for a favourable moment to come out into the open.

The fanatical Contraras rubbed his hands; his brow cleared. He had forgotten Valerie Delmonte, that too responsive instrument upon whose warped feelings he had so skilfully played. She was only a martyr in a righteous cause.

He listened eagerly to the details with which Luçue supplied him. He could see already the dawn of that universal revolution which, if it came to pass, would claim him for one of the earliest victims.

And then, when Luçue had finished, the elder man spoke a little impatiently.

“But why did we fail in Madrid? Have you suspicions of anybody? After all, the secret was very carefully guarded. How many of us knew?” Luçue shrugged his shoulders. “Is it much use going into that? We might all suspect each other. Moreno was over here a short time ago. We conversed together on the subject.”

“Ah, Moreno was over here, was he?” The Chief’s brows knitted; he spoke in a suspicious voice. “Do you know on what business?”

“Purely private affairs, I understand. Something connected

with his journalistic profession. But we were discussing the matter, and he suggested a very reasonable theory.”

“And what was that?” interrupted Contraras. “His opinion was, to start with, that women should never be employed in enterprises of this character, because they had not sufficient nerve. His theory is that there was no treachery from our side, because if there had been they would never have allowed her to get inside the Palace, they would have arrested her at the entrance.”

“It seems feasible,” interrupted the Chief. “He thinks that Valerie got nervous and overstrung, that she detached herself too early from her chaperon, that the numerous spies who were watching got suspicious of her movements, and arrested her on the off-chance.”

Contraras nodded his head, as he added, “It might be so, and it is quite true that women lose their heads more quickly than men, when things are not running exactly in the beaten track.”

“Of course, as you may or may not know, our friend Moreno, although a very excellent fellow, is one of the vainest of men. He boasted that if you had given him the job he would have done it successfully. And I have sufficient faith in him to believe he would.”

Luçue spoke quite warmly. It was not a little to the journalist’s credit that he had succeeded in persuading this rather suspicious man both of his ability and his *bona fides*.

Contraras reflected for a few moments. “I have great

confidence in your judgment, Luçue. You have known this man for a long time, eh?”

“For six or seven years, I should say.”

It was perfectly true. Moreno had been coquetting with Luçue and the brotherhood, and half a dozen other things, for quite a period.

“And you trust him implicitly? He is making much money?”

“A little more than he used. But he tells me he is miserably paid, that the capitalists he works for suck his brains to swell their own enormous profits.”

Contraras smiled. “He has brains, and he is poorly paid – in a word, he enriches the drones. He seems just our man, Luçue.”

“I am sure of it,” answered the other warmly.

“Good! I shall be seeing him in Madrid very shortly. We will try his mettle. He shall have the management of the next *coup*.”

“And that, I take it, is the removal of that busy marplot, Guy Rossett?”

“Yes,” said Contraras shortly. “But keep it to yourself and Maceda as much as possible. I won’t have too many people in the know this time.”

Luçue and Maceda promised to observe silence. The other members of the fraternity had drawn respectfully aside while the three chiefs conversed together. Jaques, otherwise Mr Jackson, arrived presently, and was informed of the conversation. He was always to be trusted. He was as great an enthusiast as Contraras himself.

“How is my little Violet getting on?” he asked.

“So far she has done good quiet work,” was the chief’s answer. “Of course, she never had the grit of poor Valerie, nor, I think, the enthusiasm.”

“Possibly, possibly,” agreed Jaques, who was very fond of his pretty protégée. “But still, if she is a bit slow, she is certainly very sure. And, although we must all make sacrifices in the great cause when we are called upon, I am glad to think she is not in the position of poor Valerie. Ah, what a fate!”

The cunning old rogue, who was making money hand over fist, sighed in real or pretended sorrow for the unhappy young Frenchwoman whose ardent sympathies had landed her in such a plight. Jaques had given plenty of money to the cause, but, like Contraras, he had never greatly risked his precious skin.

The next day Contraras returned to Madrid. He could safely leave Jaques and Luçe to look after affairs in England.

After the failure of the great *coup*, there had been a little re-shuffling. Somoza, the educated young fisherman, a burning and a shining light in the brotherhood, and Alvedero were stationed at Fonterrabia. Zorrilita was superintending affairs at Barcelona.

Contraras, the wealthy and magnificent, still maintained his quarters in the palatial hotel in the Plaza de Canovas. Moreno and Violet Hargrave were in Madrid also, but they had lodgings in a humbler quarter of the city.

Moreno often smiled when he thought what humbug it all was, this profession of democracy and equality. Because they were,

comparatively speaking, humble members of the brotherhood, they were stowed away in poky lodgings. Contraras had a suite of rooms at the best hotel in the city, and went occasionally to Court.

“What a gigantic farce,” he thought. “As if you could alter the primeval instincts of human nature by a carefully adjusted system of labels. And, as for tyranny and oppression, if I were a Spanish citizen, I would rather live under the rule of Alfonso than that of Contraras. If the old man got into the saddle, there would be plenty of shooting. He would make short work of those who didn’t agree with him, without the formality of a trial.”

Contraras was a wary old schemer. He had many visitors at his hotel – men of light and leading in the city, the aristocratic connections of his wife. But he never allowed his anarchist subordinates to come near him. He was much too clever for that. He went to them.

On the evening of the day on which he returned to Madrid, he met Moreno and Violet Hargrave at the journalist’s modest lodgings, by appointment.

Moreno, who was always fond of indulging in humorous jokes, would have liked to apologise to the wealthy Contraras for receiving him in such humble surroundings, with some caustic allusion to the time when all men would be equal.

But he forbore. Contraras was too serious a person to indulge in humour himself, or tolerate it in others. Besides, Moreno had special reasons for ingratiating himself with his Chief, whom he

privately stigmatised as a “silly old visionary,” and whose chances against the organised forces of law and order he was not prepared to back.

Contraras was very gracious to his two subordinates. Whatever his defects, he had the true note of Spanish courtesy.

He turned first to Violet Hargrave. “I have just come from London, where I met our dear friend Jaques. He inquired most tenderly after you, and sent through me his kindest remembrances.”

Violet looked very pleased. If there was a tender spot in her heart, it was for the old moneylender, who had been a father to her. She flushed a little; quite a soft light came into her eyes.

“That was very sweet of him. He really has a heart of gold, dear old Juan,” she said softly.

Moreno looked at her curiously. He had not got to the bottom of her yet. A hardened adventuress, pure and simple – that was how he had first judged her. But her kindly mention of Jaques, “an old shark of the first water,” as the young journalist classed him in his own mind, revealed something that he had not credited her with. Had she, after all, a capacity for emotion, did she possess any real womanly instincts?

Contraras next addressed himself to Moreno.

“I also met in London our comrade Luque, the man who introduced you to the brotherhood.”

“Ah, what a great man!” cried Moreno, with the fervour of a new and enthusiastic recruit. “The only man, in my opinion,

who would ever be worthy to wear your mantle, if ever it should drop from your shoulders. May that day be far distant!” he added piously.

Contraras, ever pleased with a little judicious flattery, became more amiable than ever. The glance he bent upon the young journalist was almost a benevolent one.

“Luçue speaks very highly of you, and I have always had the greatest confidence in his judgment. He tells me, and, as he did not say it in confidence, I can repeat it, you expressed your opinion that we made a mistake in allowing Valerie to undertake the great *coup*. You added that if you had been entrusted with it, you would have brought it off.”

The question was a supreme test of Moreno’s modesty, but he was not taken aback. He turned the situation lightly, and with his usual assurance.

“I am certain I should have done,” he said composedly.

Contraras frowned a little. He had been very fond of Valerie Delmonte; he rather resented any criticism of her.

“Why are you so sure, comrade Moreno? Valerie was very clever, very subtle. Are you more so?”

The young man looked at his chief calmly. “I daresay she was much more clever, much more subtle than I am, but she lacked my nerve.”

“Ah, there is something in that,” agreed the older man. “A woman may have the brains of a man, I agree, that is to say, an exceptional woman, but come to a crucial moment, and the brain

will be dominated by the nerves. It is the penalty of the sex.”

The Chief ruminated over these remarks a few seconds before he spoke again.

“Well, Moreno, I am going to give you a chance to prove your mettle. You know the next item on our programme is the removal of Guy Rossett.” Moreno nodded. He had shot a side glance at Violet Hargrave, but she had betrayed no sign of emotion. And yet, in the flat at Mount Street, she had alluded to the project in a spirit of exultation.

“It was the first item on the programme, and was shelved in favour of the later one. What do you mean precisely by the term ‘removal’?” Contraras shrugged his shoulders. “That I have not yet quite decided upon. The first thing is to get hold of him.”

“That is quite easy,” said Moreno in his usual quiet way.

Contraras looked at him sharply. “You speak very confidently, Moreno. You appreciate the difficulties in the way? To get him either out of the Embassy or his flat will be a tough job. He is well guarded, you may depend.”

“I appreciate all the difficulties, Contraras. To get him out of the Embassy is well nigh impossible. To get him out of the flat is the easier job of the two. Well, I will undertake to bring him to any place you like.”

“Your methods?” queried Contraras, in the same sharp tone.

Moreno bowed with great courtesy to his titular Chief.

“Pardon me for declining to answer that question at present. I am a very new member of the brotherhood, I have my spurs to

win, I have to justify your confidence in me, or I should rather say the confidence of Luçue, for you know next to nothing of me. I want to show you that I am a little more clever, a little more subtle than perhaps you imagine. When I deliver him to you, I will possibly explain my methods, not before.”

“You will undertake to deliver him to us?” questioned Contraras, still speaking a little doubtfully. He was, however, very much impressed by the young man’s confident manner.

“On any day, at any hour you like to name,” was the reassuring reply.

“I will settle the details later on,” said Contraras, his voice betraying a note of agitation. “Anyway, I depute you and Violet Hargrave to see that this thing is carried out.”

Moreno looked at the woman. “You will be my assistant in this?” he asked.

Her voice was very low. “Of course, if the Chief wishes it.”

Contraras spoke in his most authoritative tones. “You have no choice. You took a solemn oath to obey the orders of the Chiefs of the organisation. As your Chief, I call upon you to do this.”

Violet Hargrave bowed her head submissively. She remembered there was a terrible penalty attached to hesitation or disobedience. She also recalled the fate of Valerie Delmonte, and her face went white.

Moreno thought to himself, “Infernal old scoundrel, he doesn’t care whom he sacrifices. And in the meanwhile he is living in luxury, and getting us poor devils to run all the risk.”

Aloud he said: "And what will you do with Guy Rossett when I deliver him to you?"

Contraras reflected before he spoke. "As I told you just now, I have not quite made up my mind." He paused, and struck an imposing attitude. "You know, Moreno, it has always been my policy to strike at the head and heart of this effete system. The humbler members, mere tools of their superiors – well, I would be inclined to show them mercy."

"I know that has always been your generous inclination," replied Moreno, masking his loathing of this fanatical creature. "Well, I should say Rossett was quite a tool, very poor game."

"I am inclined to agree with you. Still, he is active and dangerous, and a menace to the Cause. He knows too much about many of us."

"Quite true, quite true," said Moreno. He had an object in humouring this venerable visionary. He wanted to know what was at the back of his mind, what dark scheme he was working out in his subtle brain!

Contraras spoke in a meditative voice. "These Englishmen are strange people; they have a great respect for their word."

"It is one of their peculiarities," admitted Moreno drily.

"If he would take a solemn oath to resign his post, and withdraw himself from any further opposition to the brotherhood, I think I would accept that, and let him go free."

"And that, I am afraid, is just the thing you will never induce an Englishman to do," said Moreno bluntly. "I know the type

too well. Better death than dishonour, all that sort of thing, you know. It's in their blood."

Contraras smiled oddly. "In that case, I think there is only one course. It is regrettable, it is repugnant to me. But the safety of the brotherhood is my first consideration."

Moreno had learned all he wanted to know. He knew now what was working in that fanatical brain.

"I understand," he said quietly. He added with the most apparent sincerity. "The safety of the brotherhood must always be the first thought. I quite agree."

Shortly after, Contraras left to return to his luxurious hotel. He parted from the two with many expressions of good-will. He was disposed to confirm Luçue's high opinion of Moreno. There was a confident bearing about the young man that impressed him. He was sure that he would prove a valuable recruit to the brotherhood.

They were left alone – the man quite young, the woman still comparatively youthful.

Moreno spoke first. "We have been assigned a post of honour, but it is also a post of danger. Don't you think so?"

Mrs Hargrave shivered. "When I remember poor Valerie Delmonte, I must confess I don't feel very brave. But you spoke very confidently of being able to snare Rossett."

"I am quite confident of being able to do that."

"I suppose you won't tell me why you are so confident of the fact?"

Moreno shook his head. "No, I certainly won't. In this business, never let your left hand know what your right hand doeth."

She shot at him a rather coquettish glance, which thrilled him just a little. She was certainly a very pretty and fascinating woman.

"I am to be trusted, really, you know," she pleaded. "I can be as close as wax."

"I will tell you some day," he answered. He thought, as he spoke, the day might be a very long one.

"But you will tell Contraras and everybody then," she pouted. "I thought we had been such pails."

It suddenly dawned upon him that this adventuress, as he had always looked upon her, was falling in love with him. He was not quite certain that he was not falling in love a little bit with her. If he were only certain that in her were the makings of a good woman! But he would require great proofs of that.

He broke a rather embarrassed silence.

"Well, now you will get your revenge on Guy Rossett."

"I am not quite so certain that I want it now." She spoke in a very low voice.

"But this is a very different mood from that of a certain night at Mount Street."

"I know, I know." Violet spoke a little wildly. "I was very bitter then. Things seemed changed somehow."

"You know that Guy Rossett has to be 'removed,' in obedience

to the orders of our revered chief?"

"I know, I know." Suddenly she burst into bitter sobbing. Presently she lifted her tear-stained face. "You think I am a very bad woman, don't you? I am not really, only hard and embittered with my early life. If I could only find somebody who really cared for me!"

It was a clear invitation. Moreno took her hand in his; he could not disguise from himself that he was attracted. But, at the same time, he did not lose his head. Could he trust her – would she be useful for his purpose?

"Suppose that I said I cared?"

Violet sobbed afresh. "No, no, it is impossible. You would never believe in me, you could never trust me."

And then Moreno leaned forward and spoke to her, very gravely.

"I think, before you leave, we must have a little conversation together. When it is finished, I will tell you whether I trust you or not."

Chapter Nineteen

It was a long time before Moreno spoke. It was evident that, in her present mood, Violet Hargrave was perfectly prepared to be made love to. It was not the first time it had occurred to him that this woman of mixed nationality like himself was more than usually attracted by him.

But although he was one of the vainest men living in certain respects, notably in the high estimate in which he always held his own capacity and mental qualities, still in other matters he was fairly modest. Every man can get some woman to fall in love with him, or, at any rate, to profess affection. Some day he would come across a woman whom he could impress sufficiently to justify him in asking her to marry him. For the time would come when, like other men, even of the most roving disposition, he would want to say good-bye to adventure and settle down quietly.

As regards his personal appearance, he was quite a just and dispassionate critic. He could look in the glass and sum up the general verdict that would be passed by the opposite sex. In appearance he was rather short and squat. His features, somewhat irregular, were redeemed from plainness by a pair of very brilliant dark eyes, and a perfect set of strong white teeth.

Still, he had not the makings of a Don Juan in him; he was not the sort of man whose path was likely to be strewn with conquests; not the type of man, like Guy Rossett, for instance,

on whom most women looked with a kindly eye, even on their first acquaintance.

Under ordinary circumstances, Violet's attitude could hardly be misinterpreted. The misty eyes raised appealingly to his, the soft inflections in her voice said as plainly as words could speak that here was a woman fully ready to respond at the first hint from him.

But he was very cautious; he felt he must proceed warily. He must never forget that this woman had been, more or less, an adventuress from her girlhood, the associate of desperate and callous men, who hesitated at nothing in the attainment of their objects. Not so very long ago, she had exulted in the prospect of obtaining a terrible revenge, through others, on the man she had once professed to love.

Why had she turned, so suddenly, as it seemed, from this vengeance, had almost said that she no longer desired revenge? In an ordinary woman, the explanation would have been simple. Rossett now no longer aroused her love or hate because she had found a new lover in Moreno himself.

Always severe to himself in these purely personal matters, he asked himself the candid question if a woman so attractive as she undoubtedly was could turn from a man of Rossett's physical advantages to himself?

Years ago, he had loved devotedly a simple little girl with no pretensions to beauty or great charm, possessing only average intelligence. He had loved her for her sweet nature, her good

qualities. And she had loved him in return.

But this was an entirely different matter. That poor little dead girl, still a very tender memory, had never had any other lover but himself. Violet Hargrave, with her powers of fascination, her blonde prettiness, her quick mentality, must have had many men at her feet.

Did the foreign element in him attract the foreign element in her? It might be so, but he could not be sure of that. In many things he was more Spanish in thought and feeling than English, but she was more English than Spanish in everything, of that he was convinced.

Had he been a few years younger, had he enjoyed less experience in life, have thought less over social problems, anarchist doctrines might have appealed to him very strongly. He was sure they would never appeal to her, the English strain in her was too strong.

When he spoke, he put a very leading question.

“I have often wondered whether you are really greatly interested in the Cause? Whether the methods we have to adopt are not somewhat repugnant to you?”

He looked at her very steadfastly. He judged her to be an admirable actress, but he noticed she did not meet his glance. Perhaps if she was really attracted by him, as she seemed to be, it was not so easy to act.

She spoke a little nervously. “What on earth has made you think that? Why should I be here if I were not sincere? I joined

the organisation of my own free will. Juan Jaques, who was my sponsor, explained everything very clearly to me.”

Moreno spoke lightly. “You have been comfortably off for many years, and you are more English than foreign. Anarchist principles don’t take deep root in English soil.”

“My father was a revolutionary at heart, although not an active one,” she said hastily. “Of course, I don’t suppose my mother thought about such things.”

Moreno was too polite to say he did not believe in that little fiction about her father. This derelict parent might not have had a very great love for the social institutions from which he did not derive much benefit. But from a natural dissatisfaction with his own lot to professed anarchy was a long step.

“It runs in the blood naturally, then, that I can understand. Still, it puzzles me. Women don’t think very seriously about these matters – or, at any rate, only a very few of them. And women of means are hardly likely to be keen on upsetting a world in which they are fairly comfortable, in favour of a new dispensation, the results of which are highly problematical.”

She fenced with him a little longer. “Why are you so sure I was comfortably off?” she queried.

“I think you must have forgotten what you told me. Your husband made money through the good offices of Jaques, and that money became yours. That flat in Mount Street was not run on a small income.”

She became a little agitated under his rather ruthless cross-

examination and suggestions.

“The money that was left me was not enough to support me comfortably. I had to turn to other means of support.”

“You would not care to tell me what they were?” Of course he had heard rumours about that Mount Street establishment, that the host and hostess were suspiciously lucky at cards. The man, at any rate, had always suffered from a shady reputation.

She became more agitated. “Yes, it is quite simple. I have been well-paid for my services by Jaques.”

“Then it was simply money that induced you to join the brotherhood?”

“Money, combined with my natural sympathy with their objects.”

Moreno appeared to accept the explanation. Jaques seemed, then, to have paid her handsomely for her services. But evidently he had not paid her enough, or she would not have trafficked with Guy Rossett and sold him important secrets.

It was some little time before he spoke again, and then he played his trump card.

He left the personal question altogether, and spoke of the affairs of the brotherhood.

“There must be traitors amongst us,” he said presently, “although I do not think they are to be found in Spain – so many things have leaked out.”

“Yes.” She spoke very quickly. “There was the failure of poor Valerie Delmonte. Do you think there was treachery there?”

“I rather doubt it,” answered Moreno easily. “My theory has always been that she drew suspicion on herself by her inexperience, her amateurish methods, her suspicious movements when she got inside the Palace. If the job had been entrusted to me, with my steady nerves, I think I should have been successful. I boasted as much to Contraras, and I suppose that is the reason he has given me this job.”

Violet was silent. Moreno went on smoothly.

“But with regard to that affair of Guy Rossett, the information he got which, for the moment, frustrated our plans – that was clearly the work of a traitor. That happened just before I came on the scene, but Luçue has told me all about it.”

He was looking at her very steadfastly. She was trying to avoid his gaze, but those dark, brilliant eyes of his drew her lighter ones with a certain mesmeric power.

She was not acting well to-night, he thought. There crept into her troubled glance a shadow of fear. She tried to speak lightly, indifferently, but her voice broke and faltered, in spite of her efforts at self-control.

“It seems like it. Have you any idea of who the traitor was?”

Moreno rose and walked over to the little shabby sofa, typical furniture of the mean lodgings, where she sat. He flung at her the direct challenge.

“It is not a question of having an idea. *I know.*” She laughed hysterically; she hardly knew what she was saying. “You think you know, perhaps. Probably you have been led to suspect the

wrong person.”

“Not when I have seen the actual memoranda, not when I have a photograph of that memoranda in my possession, to show, if necessary, to Contraras.”

For a moment she seemed paralysed. All the colour left her cheeks. She could only clasp her hands together and moan piteously.

Moreno spoke quite gently. “Violet Hargrave, you haven’t an ounce of fight left in you. Give in and own you sold those secrets to Guy Rossett. I expect he paid a handsome sum for them – and probably because you sold them, you lost your lover.”

She burst into a fit of wild sobbing, and threw herself at his feet. She had not the heroic spirit of Valerie Delmonte. She was only a very commonplace adventuress, with a well-defined streak of cowardice in her. Like Madame Du Barri, she would have gone shrieking to her death.

“Are you going to denounce me?” she cried wildly.

Moreno was a kind-hearted man. To an extent he despised her, although he was half in love with her. But he could not but feel pitiful at the spectacle of her abject terror.

“That depends,” he said quietly. “It is quite possible we may drive a bargain.”

Reassured by those conciliatory words, the woman speedily recovered her self-control. She rose from her kneeling attitude, brushed the tears from her eyes, adjusted her disordered hair. As long as she escaped with life, she would consent to any bargain.

What a mercy she had not been found out by Contraras, or some equally implacable and fanatical member of the brotherhood! In that case, her shrift would have been very short. This black-browed young man, born of a Spanish father and an English mother, had this much of the English strain in him, that he leaned to the side of mercy.

“How did you find out? How did you suspect?” were her first words when she had recovered herself.

“What first led me to suspect. I cannot quite explain – it was a sort of intuition. When I once suspected, the rest was easy.”

“It was Guy Rossett who gave me away?” she cried, and an angry gleam came into her eyes.

Moreno looked at her a little contemptuously.

“And you have known this man well, and loved him! Are you not a shrewder judge of human nature than to harbour such a suspicion? Why, Rossett is just that dogged type of Englishman who would rather be put to death than betray a confidence.”

Violet looked a little ashamed. “But if not from him, how did you obtain your information?”

“That is my affair. When I have quite assured myself that I can trust you, I may tell you. It suffices that I hold in my possession the photograph of that document. By the way, you lost your head when you gave yourself away like that, because your handwriting is known to several. Why did you not dictate your notes to Rossett and let him take them down? Then you might never have been found out.”

“I know I was a fool,” answered Mrs Hargrave bitterly. “I suppose all criminals make mistakes at times. I was terribly hard up at the time; I was in desperate want of money. I pitched a plausible tale to Guy, which I believe he swallowed at the time.”

“Ah!” said Moreno. Then it was not on account of this transaction that Rossett had broken off his relations with the pretty widow. The cause was no doubt to be sought in Isobel Clandon.

“I pretended that a Spaniard whom I had known in my youth was ready to turn traitor for a handsome consideration. He had confided these notes to me, and I had taken them down from his dictation. Of course, I ought to have done as you said. I was so eager for the money that I did not stop to think.”

“And you are quite sure that Rossett did not suspect you of being a member of the brotherhood?”

“Positive. He is not naturally a suspicious man, not like yourself, for instance. I pretended that this man, the imaginary man, was an old friend of my father’s, that he hated the whole business and wanted to get out of it.”

Moreno pondered a little. In spite of her physical attraction for him, she was a pretty bad character on her own admissions. She had owned her great obligations to Jaques, who, rascal that he was, had been her benefactor. And yet she was ready to sell Jaques and the Cause he held so dear at heart for ready money. Was it possible a woman with this unscrupulous and predatory temperament could ever become a reformed character? And, if

so, was he a likely man to bring about the miracle? Passionate love might work wonders, but was she not a little past the age of passionate love?

“Let us come to the point,” he said abruptly. “I take it you no longer desire what we politely term the ‘removal’ of Guy Rossett.”

“Certainly not. I don’t know that I ever really desired it.”

Moreno raised his hand. “Don’t forget that night at the flat in Mount Street.”

“I know, I remember perfectly. I gave you a very bad impression of myself. I was angry, humiliated, bitterly jealous of a younger woman who had taken him from me.”

Moreno thought he understood. “And the Spanish side came uppermost then. You could have run a dagger into the pair of them at the moment, and perhaps after you had done it, sat down and wept because you had killed the man. I don’t suppose you would have shed a tear over the woman – she would have deserved her fate.”

Violet was recovering herself fast. The colour had come back into her cheeks. She looked at him admiringly.

“You seem to know something of my delightful sex,” she said, with a faint smile. Then, after a pause, she added, “And you want to drive a bargain with me, don’t you, in return for not denouncing me?”

Moreno assented. “You are quite right. You say you now don’t desire the removal of Rossett. To be quite frank, no more do I.”

She looked at him sharply out of her tear-dimmed eyes, red and swollen with the violent weeping of a few seconds ago.

“But why do you wish to spare Guy Rossett? You say you are a true son of the Revolution.”

“I am,” replied Moreno composedly. “I am with certain reservations.” He felt he could not trust her too implicitly yet. “When they attack the Heads, the great ones of the earth, I am in the heartiest sympathy with them – that is the way to obtain our ends. But I draw the line at making martyrs of the small fry, the mere instruments, the humble tools of the despotic system. I think it brings justly deserved odium on us. To remove an inoffensive person like Rossett is worse than a crime, it is a blunder. If the great Revolution is coming, how can a feeble person like him stop its impetuous course?”

Violet Hargrave listened attentively. When was he going to suggest the terms of the bargain?

“Will you help me to save young Rossett? It is the price of my silence. You can do nothing against me. Whatever innuendos or suggestions you might make, if such occur to you, would not weigh a moment against the damning evidence in my possession. They would only regard it as the frantic action of a guilty woman, trying to save herself from their vengeance.”

He thought it wise to rub this in. He did not believe she was very clever, but she was cunning. He wanted to divert her from any idea of attempting to readjust the situation to her own advantage.

“You show me very plainly you don’t trust me, by that somewhat unnecessary warning,” she said a little bitterly. She was hardened enough, heaven knows, but the distrust of the man she had grown to care for hurt her more than she liked to admit.

“I am not quite a fool,” she added. “You have the whip-hand of me, I admit frankly. If I thought to match myself against you, and bluff it out, I recognise I have not a dog’s chance. Yes, I am willing to help you to save Guy Rossett. But I would like you to tell me why you want so particularly to save him.”

But Moreno was not going to satisfy her curiosity. He gave her one of his reasons.

“Because I hate and loathe unnecessary bloodshed,” was his answer.

There was a long pause, during which Violet’s mind worked rapidly.

“Are you very sure in your own mind how you are going to save him?” she asked presently. “I mean, so that we can go scot free.”

Self would always be the predominating note, he thought. Well, perhaps that was natural.

He tapped his forehead significantly.

“I have pretty well worked it out here; there are just a few details to be filled in. With regard to our own personal safety, I feel pretty confident I shall be unsuspected. As for you, I will guarantee it. I will see you every day, as my plans develop.”

Violet rose to say good night. There was genuine admiration

in her glance, as she held out her hand.

“I believe you are a very wonderful man,” she said, in a tone of conviction.

Moreno smiled, well pleased with the delicate flattery. He always had a kindly feeling towards anybody who praised his mental qualities.

He saw her to the door. As they parted, she lifted up her face.

“You would not care to kiss a woman of my type – bad, selfish and unscrupulous as you know me to be?” she said boldly.

For a second he hesitated. Then he kissed her lightly on her pale cheek. He could not bring himself yet to touch her lips.

“Anyway, you are going to do a good thing now,” he said, as she passed out.

Chapter Twenty

During these hot summer days, poor Isobel lived in alternate fits of hope and despair.

Guy visited her every day. He always seemed very cheerful, full of optimism. The forces of law and order must prevail; these mad anarchists, well organised as they were, and led by a most subtle brain, would be defeated very shortly. Once the Heads were taken, the movement would suffer a speedy eclipse.

But at times it seemed to her quick woman's ears that there was a false note in his cheerful tones, that he was not so certain of the ultimate result as he pretended to be.

Moreno came to see her every day too. She had conceived a strong liking for the black-browed young journalist. Moreover, she had great faith in him.

Guy, of course, was her king amongst men. But she was not so hopelessly in love that she could not distinguish between the mental qualities of the two. Guy was very intelligent; he could snatch at the hints of others, and shape his course of conduct on them.

But Moreno had a subtle and penetrating intellect, a touch of genius. And he combined inspiration with prudence.

If Guy talked cheerfully when he was with her, her fears and doubts revived on his departure. Could he look all round and accurately weigh the chances?

When Moreno told her to cheer up, and promised that all would be well, she felt fortified. There was a sureness, a quiet power about the man that raised her drooping spirits.

“You are sure that you will beat them, you are sure you will save Guy?” she had asked him one day, when he had paid her a brief visit.

He spoke very deliberately. “I have outwitted them once before.” He looked a little gloomy as he spoke. It went to his kind heart to recall that on that occasion he had been compelled to sacrifice that charming young Frenchwoman, Valerie Delmonte. “I shall outwit them again, believe me.”

His tone was very confident, Isobel thought. “I am sure you will lay your plans very well, Mr Moreno, but there is many a slip between the cup and the lip.”

“The cup will be carried to the lip this time without a falter.” He spoke with his usual assurance.

“Guy always speaks cheerfully too,” said Isobel in her simple, straightforward way. “But I am always doubtful when he leaves me.”

“Mr Rossett does not know what is in my mind, Miss Clandon. And I dare not tell him, for reasons of my own. An incautious confidence might utterly frustrate my plans. I have many helping me, but I have close at hand a man who is going to be my ablest lieutenant. Strange to say, you know that man well.”

Isobel lifted up to him startled eyes. “You bewilder me. I know so few people.”

“It will surprise you to know that your cousin, Maurice Farquhar, is in Madrid at the present moment and waiting to receive my instructions.”

“Maurice Farquhar in Madrid,” she repeated. “But why, but why?”

“Because I wanted to have a clear-brained, resolute Englishman at my right hand when the supreme moment came. I can’t tell you everything. I daren’t tell you much. Would you like to see your cousin? I can manage it easily.”

“Oh, I would love to,” replied Isobel promptly, speaking according to the dictates of her open, generous nature. Then she suddenly remembered that Guy had expressed a certain jealousy of her cousin. “But perhaps at the moment it might not be prudent. I am here *incognita*, in a rather difficult situation. Later on, perhaps.”

From those few halting phrases Moreno guessed accurately enough what was passing in her mind. She had a sincere affection, for her cousin, who came over here to assist her at the greatest personal inconvenience, but she would not see him, in case his visit might give offence to her lover. It is ever thus that self-sacrifice in love is rewarded.

“I quite understand,” he said. “Well, Farquhar is a white man, a man in a thousand. I wrung a promise from him some time ago that he would come over here to help me to save Mr Rossett. You can guess why he gave me that promise.”

“Yes,” answered Isobel in a low voice. “I can guess why he

gave that promise. He wanted to help me. You cannot tell how mean I felt. Oh, I think I will risk it. Please ask him to come and see me.”

Moreno shook his head. “No, better perhaps not to risk it. Farquhar is content to do good by stealth. We cannot be quite sure of the view the other gentleman might take of it, if it came to his ears.”

Isobel felt a frightful coward, but she was relieved by Moreno’s words. Guy was very impetuous, and terribly jealous. She could not afford to rouse his suspicions. He left her feeling a little miserable and self-reproachful. Why could not men take a broad-minded view of things? Even if a girl were engaged, it did not follow that she should not be allowed to have a faithful friend.

She had grown very weary of Madrid. She hated the place and the people, under these most unhappy circumstances.

The good-natured Mrs Godwin had done her best to amuse her. She had taken her to the Museo del Prado, and pointed out to her the masterpieces of Velazquez, Murillo, Ribera, and other great masters. She had conducted her down the animated plaza of the Puerta del Sol. She had shown her the view from the Campillo de las Vistillas. They were too late for the Carnivals, and to a bull-fight Isobel would not go.

Moreno betook himself to the quarters of Farquhar. He found the self-contained young barrister stretched on a sofa, reading a French novel.

Farquhar was already a bit tired of it. On reflection, he was

not quite certain if he had not been a little foolish in giving that promise. He had rushed over to Spain to help a man whose only claim to consideration lay in the fact that he had taken away from him the woman he wanted for his wife.

Then he thought of the charming Lady Mary, her warm praise and flattering words. When he got back to England and recounted his exploits to her, he was sure he would receive a very warm welcome. Farquhar threw down his book, and lighted a cigar. "Well, my good old friend, things seem devilish slow just now. Is anything going to happen shortly?"

Moreno nodded. "Things will happen the evening after to-morrow. Curb your impatience till then."

"You have got it all cut and dried, then?"

"I think so. To-morrow morning I will take you to my excellent friend, the Chief of Police, and tell him that you represent me. We will spend an hour or two afterwards in discussing our plans. I have just come from Miss Clandon."

"Ah," said Farquhar, with affected carelessness – that name had still power to thrill him in spite of Lady Mary. "Did you find her quite well?"

"Perfectly, so far as her health is concerned, but naturally full of doubts and fears. I told her you were here; she was, of course, greatly surprised. She expressed a wish to see you." This, of course, was not the strict truth, but Moreno always wanted to make everybody feel happy and comfortable.

A pleased expression stole over the man's face. "Oh, she said

that, did she?"

Moreno did not answer the question directly.

"I pointed out to her that, in my opinion, such a meeting might be extremely dangerous, and that it is essential you should lie very low."

Farquhar accepted the glib explanation. Moreno had one of the greatest qualities of a diplomatist, that he could impress nearly everybody with his sincerity.

Next morning the two men interviewed the Chief of Police, or rather the Chief of Police, by appointment, interviewed them at the journalist's modest lodgings. In the course of that interview many things were explained at length.

Moreno, always cautious, always on the look out for accidents, stood by the window, keeping a vigilant eye on passers-by. Farquhar and the Chief sat at the far end of the room.

Suddenly he espied the tall form of Contraras nearing the house. He bundled his guests into his bedroom. "The old devil! I had a suspicion he might turn up. It is quite safe here. If I give a loud whistle, get under the bed."

But Contraras did not pay a long visit; he did not even sit down. He had only strolled round to ascertain that things were going right. Moreno, resolutely avoiding details, assured him that everything was in train. On the evening after to-morrow Guy Rossett would be delivered into the hands of the brotherhood, to be dealt with as they thought fit.

Contraras left well pleased. Moreno was certainly a great

acquisition to the organisation. When he was well out of sight the two men were brought out of the bedroom.

The Chief of Police shook his fist vindictively in the direction of the vanished figure.

“I was itching to take the old scoundrel straight away, Mr Moreno,” he remarked.

The journalist smiled. “Impetuosity never pays, señor. You could have proved nothing if you had. A most respectable old gentleman, highly connected, through his wife, with some of the best families in the country, pays me a visit to inquire after my health, or perhaps to ask me to dinner at his hotel. You would not have made much out of it.”

The Chief cooled down immediately under this sensible speech. “You are a very wonderful man, Mr Moreno. You never allow yourself to be carried away by your feelings.”

He turned with his gracious foreign manner to Farquhar.

“I understand, sir, you are an old and trusted friend. I have no doubt that you have the same faith in his judgment that I have.”

On the afternoon of that same day Moreno went to see Violet Hargrave. He found her restless and agitated.

“You are sure that it will take place to-morrow night?” was her first question.

“I am as near sure as can be. Unless a miracle happens he will be brought up for judgment before the brotherhood,” was the answer.

Violet shuddered; her face went pale. “I have never been at

one of their so-called trials, but it must be very horrible.”

“Neither have I,” said Moreno. “I see, like myself, you don’t anticipate much pleasure from it.”

“But you are going to save him, and I am going to help you,” she cried a little wildly. “You have not yet told me where I come in. The time is very short; you will have to speak soon. Why not speak now?”

The young man hesitated for a few seconds. How far should he trust her? Caution whispered not too far.

He spoke in a gloomy tone. “To tell you the truth, I am not so sure of saving him as I was. Certain things have happened which I had not taken into my calculations.”

He was watching her narrowly as he spoke, to note the effect upon her of his words. She clasped her hands together and her voice faltered.

“I am so in the dark, you tell me nothing, you keep everything to yourself.” She betrayed great agitation, but it was evident she believed his statements implicitly.

As a matter of fact, nothing had occurred to upset Moreno’s plans in the slightest degree. But there was something about which he had been a little careless. He had pretty well secured his own safety, but he had not secured hers.

“I cannot enter into a lot of explanations, when circumstances alter from hour to hour,” he said rather brusquely. “On the whole, I believe I have a better chance of saving him without your co-operation. Now, please don’t ask me why I think so!”

“I won’t, if you don’t wish it,” she answered submissively. “I wish you could have been more frank with me, have given me some hint of what you intend to do. It will be very terrible for me to be there, waiting on the turn of events.”

“You no longer desire revenge on Guy Rossett?” he asked, looking at her intently.

“Not that sort of revenge,” she answered truthfully. “For I suppose murder is in their thoughts.”

“I had a brief talk with Contraras this morning; he came round to my rooms. He was more frank than he usually is with his subordinates. I suppose he was pleased with the way in which I have, so far, conducted the affair. He thought there would be great difficulty in getting hold of Guy Rossett.”

“Will you tell me, some day, why you found it easy?”

“Some day, perhaps; but not now. To return to our chief, Contraras. He explained to me that he has no desire to remove this particular man, if he will fall into line with him. He frankly admits that he is too small game, that he would willingly avoid the odium that such a deed would bring on the brotherhood.”

“Ah!” Violet was very interested now. “If he falls in line with him. What does that mean? Or perhaps,” she added bitterly, “this is another secret that is to be hidden from me.”

“Not at all,” was the quiet answer. “I usually keep my own secrets, but I am not always so scrupulous with regard to the secrets of others. Contraras is going to offer him two alternatives. The first is – that he resigns from the Embassy on some plausible

pretext, and takes a solemn oath to do nothing to thwart the brotherhood. The other alternative you can guess.”

“Death,” whispered Violet in a hollow voice, and her face went as pale as death itself.

“And you can guess what Rossett’s answer will be?” said Moreno, breaking the long silence that ensued between them after those significant words.

“I know, I know. He will choose death unless you can save him.” The woman in her came suddenly to the surface, and she broke down, sobbing bitterly.

Moreno looked at her steadily, but not unkindly, for a long time. Her emotion was genuine enough, he was sure. When the dastardly project had only been in the air, so to speak, she had not realised the full horror of it. Now that it was so near to accomplishment, she was stricken with remorse for having harboured such revengeful thoughts.

And presently he spoke again, in his quiet, deliberate accents.

“By a miracle, it may be possible for me to save him, if I can outwit them.”

“But cannot I help you? I know you do not believe much in the capacity of women, but I am not a fool, and in a crisis I believe my nerves are steady.”

“If it is fated for me to succeed, I shall work better alone. But I would like to ask you this. It will be a cruel ordeal for you to be present at this scene, especially at the moment when you will be called upon to record your vote as a member of the

tribunal. Would you be grateful to me if I could save you from that ordeal?"

"Very, very grateful," sobbed the now sorely stricken woman. "But it is impossible. I have seen Contraras to-day also. He has arranged for Alvedero to fetch me to-morrow evening, and to conduct me to that awful house where we are to receive Guy Rossett. It is impossible."

"There are very few things in this world that are impossible," said Moreno, a little impatiently. "The first idea I had was that you would frankly throw yourself on the compassion of Contraras, tell him that this man was once your lover, and that you must be excused from taking part in the proceedings on the ground of common humanity. The question is, would that work? It might, because I know he is still remorseful about the fate of Valerie Delmonte. But we are not sure. He is a fanatic of the deepest dye."

"Absolutely a fanatic," corroborated Mrs Hargrave. "To him the welfare of the brotherhood is the one supreme thing. All human emotions must be subjugated, all consideration of friends and kindred swept aside, in pursuance of the one object."

"I am disposed to agree," said Moreno. "Contraras' sense of compassion is a doubtful factor. We will discard that idea. Will you put yourself in my hands?"

She looked intently into the dark, brilliant eyes, and what she read there reassured her. He was stubbornly secretive, but he was kind and sympathetic. He was ready to do his best to serve her.

“Yes, I will,” she said bravely. “I trust you.”

“Good! Then that is settled. Alvedero will call for you to-morrow evening as arranged, but you will not accompany him. He will come alone.”

“How are you going to do it?” she cried breathlessly. Her admiration for the man had grown intensely during the last few days. He seemed able to work miracles.

“I shall keep that a secret too till to-morrow morning, when I shall be round at eleven o’clock. If I told you now, you would not get a wink of sleep all night.”

“I shall not get a wink of sleep as it is,” she answered.

But, secretive to the last, Moreno was not to be tempted into frankness. “Oh, yes, you will. Anyway, you have promised to leave yourself in my hands. To-morrow morning, at eleven o’clock.”

They shook hands without another word. Moreno walked back to his lodgings reflecting deeply.

Was this attractive young woman really as bad as he had once thought? Was she not rather a creature of strong passions, of impulses at times ungovernable? Were there not in her womanly feelings that could be cherished and fostered by sympathetic companionship?

Anyway, if she followed his instructions, as she had agreed to do, he had secured her safety as well as his own. And that would be a result that would gratify him exceedingly.

Chapter Twenty One

Save for a little impatience when his judgment was impugned, or somebody questioned the soundness of his opinions, Moreno was a person of the most equable temperament, and singularly light hearted.

Still, when he rose early on the morning of this most eventful day, he was in a very grave and thoughtful mood. He was playing a most difficult and dangerous game. Even if he outwitted the Heads of the brotherhood in Spain, as he believed he had, there were left Luque and Jaques in London to deal with.

To save Guy Rossett was easy enough; he had laid his plans very surely for that. But he had to save himself; also to save Violet Hargrave. In the plausible explanations that he would have to give in London, there must be no loopholes.

Very early in the morning he again saw the Chief of Police, in company with Farquhar, who, now that the game was really afoot, was manifesting a keen interest in the chase. They rehearsed the whole programme all over again.

“He is cleverer than I thought him at first,” whispered Moreno to his friend, when the somewhat stout man had withdrawn for a moment to consult one of his lieutenants. “But I am relying on you to be constantly at his elbow. You are not the sort of chap to get flurried.”

And Farquhar, although quite a modest kind of fellow, agreed

that he could keep his head in a crisis.

At eleven o'clock, as arranged, Moreno presented himself at the lodgings of Mrs Hargrave. She looked very pale and there were dark rings round her eyes. It was easy to see that her night had been a perturbed one, that she had enjoyed little or no sleep.

"You don't look in the best of health and spirits," he said kindly. "Well, you have got to pluck up your courage. You will want plenty of it for the next twenty-four hours."

She shivered. "If I had known what I was going in for, I would never have yielded to Jaques' entreaties," she said.

"You never quite know what you will be landed in when you embark in these enterprises," answered the young man lightly. "Well, now to business. You still want to be absent from that meeting to-night?"

"If it is possible."

"It is quite possible, but you will have to rely on me, and you will also have to be very brave."

He drew out of his pocket a small, dark-coloured phial, and held it to the light.

"You see that?" he asked. "Well, this is going to be your salvation."

She shivered again; her nerves were very much out of order this morning, but she began to have an idea of what he was driving at.

"This is the secret, then, that you would not tell me last night. I have got to drink that."

Moreno nodded. "Yes, if you are still in the same mind as you were yesterday. In my very early youth I was apprenticed to a chemist. I very soon began to acquire a wide knowledge of drugs, and their properties."

They had been standing up to the present. Moreno pointed to a sofa.

"We can talk more easily if we sit. I have mixed you here a perfectly safe compound, which I want you to drink before I leave, so that I can take away the bottle; I would prefer it was not left lying about, you understand."

She looked at him with eyes that expressed a great dread. "What effect will it have?"

"I tell you frankly, about six or seven o'clock you will feel very ill, very faint. Those effects will last for the best part of twelve hours. A few hours after that, you will be yourself again."

She looked at him narrowly. A dark wave of suspicion had suddenly flowed over her mind. She was sure, with a woman's certain intuition, that he was greatly attracted by her. Still, she knew nothing of him.

He had always said he was a true son of the Revolution, although she had somewhat distrusted the sincerity of that statement. Had he, out of loyalty to the Cause, revealed her perfidy to the others, and was he deputed by them to poison her, under the specious pretext of falling in with her wishes?

He read her dark, suspicious thoughts as easily as he would have read an open book. He spoke very gently, very tenderly. She

had never appealed to him more than at this moment, with her pallid cheeks, the haunting dread in her eyes.

“My dear, you do not trust me, I can see. Your mind is full of doubt. Well,” – he stooped and kissed her – “I can only swear by everything I hold holy and sacred that I would not harm a hair of your head.”

No man could lie so convincingly as that. She reached out her hand for the phial, then quickly drew it back.

“I am afraid, dreadfully afraid,” she murmured in a low voice. “I don’t know which to choose – to do as you tell me, or to go to that dreadful place.”

“You must do as you please.” He was still very patient, but she noticed there was certain coldness in his tones.

She rose and walked about the room, wringing her hands. Her faith in him had come back, but she was still terribly afraid.

“It is early yet,” said Moreno presently. “You have plenty of time to send round for Contraras and throw yourself on his compassion. Implore him not to compel you to assist at the condemnation, perhaps the execution, of a man who was once your lover. He might give way.”

“The last thing he would do. He would think it a grand opportunity to show my fidelity to the Cause. He would let nothing stand in the way if it were his own case.”

“I agree with you now, as I agreed before when we discussed the same subject. Well, you must make up your mind. Take this, or wait here and come with Alvedero to-night.”

She was still wavering, torn between faith and doubt. "But you said you could save Guy Rossett? Is there any doubt of that?"

And Moreno, out of his pity for the woman, out of the attraction she possessed for him, spoke more plainly than he had intended.

"There is great doubt of it. But even if I could save Guy Rossett, I doubt if I could save you. I might just manage to save myself."

And then, in a flash, she understood, and she doubted him no longer.

"I think I see it all now. You are no more a true son of the Cause than I am a true daughter. I sold their secrets for money. You would betray them for the same or other reasons."

Moreno did not answer the question directly. He simply held out the phial towards her. "Will you drink this or not?"

She took it from him with a hand that no longer trembled. "Yes. I believe you now. I will drink it. Tell me what I am to do, how I am to act when it begins to take effect!"

"Do nothing; just go to the sofa and lie down. In a few minutes you will be in a stupor, unconscious of everything and everybody. Your landlady may come up; she can act as she pleases; send for a doctor or not. Probably nobody will come near you till Alvedero arrives. When he sees you there he can act as he pleases too. Anyway, he cannot stay long, because he will be due at the brotherhood, to whom he will bring the report of your sudden indisposition."

“And if the doctor comes, will he not guess?”

“*Dios!*” cried Moreno, relapsing for a moment into Spanish. “You will be all right again long before the doctor has picked out your complaint from a dozen others that present similar symptoms.” She pulled the cork from the phial, and sniffed the contents. “There is no odour about it,” she said.

“Not the slightest,” said Moreno quietly. “I took very good care of that. I think if the doctor does come, he will be a bit puzzled.”

She drank it down at a draught, then handed the bottle back to her visitor.

“I am an adventuress, and you are – well – a sort of adventurer,” she said, with a half smile. “Well, you see, I have given you a proof of my faith in you.”

Moreno put the phial into his pocket, and held out his hand.

“Good-bye, for the present.”

“Shall I see you to-morrow?” asked Violet, as she walked with him to the door. “You say after about twelve hours I shall be myself again.”

“Certainly,” answered Moreno in his gayest tones. Yes, whatever betided, he would certainly see her to-morrow. Her trust in him had made her more attractive than ever.

On the whole, he thought he had done the best for her. Once he had thought of getting the Spanish police to arrest her on some false charge, with the view of letting her go as soon as all danger was past. But this method did not appeal to him very greatly. The

police would be glad enough to get her into their clutches, but they might not care to let her go so easily. Too much explanation might be necessary, in the first instance.

And he always had to adapt his policy to the view of what questions might be asked in London. The tale she could tell now would be a very simple one. She had been attacked in the evening by a sudden seizure, had relapsed into unconsciousness, and been oblivious of everything till the next day.

That evening, at a few minutes past nine, Alvedero knocked at the door of the mean house. When the landlady opened it, he perceived that she was in a great state of agitation.

“Oh, señor, something terrible has happened. I went up to madame’s room some twenty minutes ago to take her her light supper. She was lying unconscious on the sofa, and she has not stirred since.”

Alvedero bounded up the stairs, entered the room, and gazed on the motionless form. At first he thought she was dead, but, on placing his hand on her heart, he could feel it beating.

“She looks as if she were dying. Have you sent for a doctor?”

“Yes. After I found that I could not pull her round, I sent my husband to fetch the first one he could find.”

Alvedero reflected as to his course of action. Humanity suggested that he should stay by the side of the insensible woman till the doctor arrived and gave his opinion as to her condition. But humanity was not a particular trait of the brotherhood, and Alvedero had less of it than most of his colleagues. He had

arrived five minutes late, he had spent another five minutes here. If he left at once, he would still be keeping his colleagues waiting.

Besides, what good could he do? If the woman were not dying, as he believed she was, it must be hours before she recovered. The tribunal must sit without her. The sooner he went and informed them of that fact, the better.

He turned towards the door, and spoke a few parting words to the landlady.

“Don’t leave her till the doctor comes. Obey whatever instructions he gives promptly. I will see that you are rewarded for your trouble. I will look in again, in two or three hours from now. Please sit up for me.”

He walked a few yards down the street, where a cab was waiting. He entered it, and was driven rapidly towards an obscure portion of the town.

Half an hour later, Isobel was sitting in the drawing-room alone. Her host and hostess had gone on a visit to some friends who lived near. Guy had not been able to see her during the day, as he had been too busily engaged with his official duties. He had sent round a note telling her he would be round in the evening. She was expecting him every minute.

There was a tap at the door. The maid entered with a letter. The gentleman who had brought it was waiting in the hall for an answer.

She recognised the handwriting on the envelope at once as that of her cousin Maurice Farquhar. She tore it open and read

the few pencilled words: "I want to see you at once. It is about Mr Rossett." She rushed out into the hall, and almost pulled him into the room.

"What is it?" she panted in terrified tones. "Something has happened to Guy."

"Yes, something has happened, but you must be brave and not give way. He has been trapped by the anarchists, but all will be well. Moreno assures me that he has foreseen this, and will save him. I am now on my way to do my share in the rescue."

"Can I come with you?" pleaded Isobel. "I shall go mad if I stop here."

For a moment Farquhar hesitated. He had a rooted dislike to women mixing themselves up in dangerous or turbulent scenes. But her pleading eyes overcame his scruples.

"Yes, if you wish. I have a cab waiting. Leave a note for these people here explaining your absence. Then put on your things and come with me. I will explain everything as we go along."

A few minutes later they were seated side by side, driving to the same obscure quarter of the town which had long ago been reached by the Spanish anarchist Alvedero.

Chapter Twenty Two

In a shabby room of a shabby house in one of the most obscure quarters of Madrid, five men were sitting. They were Contraras, Zorrilta, Alvedero, Moreno, and Somoza, the fisherman of Fonterrabia.

“Guy Rossett is here, in the next room.” It was Moreno who spoke. He turned to the fisherman. “Has he recovered sufficiently, Somoza?”

The fisherman answered: “He was still a little bit dazed a minute ago when I left him. The handkerchief I flung over his face contained a pretty strong dose. I should give him another ten minutes before he is ready to face the tribunal.”

The capture had been easy. Guy Rossett, reckless of danger, had left his flat to pay his visit to Isobel Clandon. Two members of the Secret Police were ready to accompany him. Fearful of compromising Isobel, he had rather roughly dispensed with their services. Reluctantly, they had obeyed him. They agreed between themselves that an Englishman was always pig-headed, a bit of a dare-devil, and inclined to take risks.

Guy walked carelessly along. He was in rather good spirits. He had received that day a cheerful note from Moreno that everything was going well, that very soon the heads of the anarchist movement in Spain would be laid by the heels.

Of course, in this letter, Moreno did not explain his methods.

If he had done so, Guy might not have been in quite such high spirits.

For at this moment, playing his very difficult game of saving Guy Rossett, saving himself and Violet Hargrave, and also snaring the anarchists, Moreno could only give his full confidence to one man, his old friend and companion, Maurice Farquhar.

As a matter of fact, Rossett never knew what had really taken place that night. He was never told that Moreno knew of his projected visit to Isobel that evening, from a random remark of hers dropped in the afternoon – that he had set Somoza and another tall Biscayan fisherman to follow him, for the purpose of bringing him to the house where the heads of the anarchist movement were assembled in solemn conclave.

Rossett walked gaily along. He would have a precious hour with Isobel. In a dark street two men came up behind him. One pinioned his arms from behind. Somoza pressed a saturated handkerchief over his face. In a few seconds the unfortunate young diplomatist was drugged and helpless.

A cab, driven by a member of the brotherhood, had crawled slowly after the two men. As soon as the driver saw what had happened, he drove rapidly up. The two powerful men lifted the inert body into the vehicle. He was partially recovered when they halted at the house where the tribunal of five was sitting to pronounce judgment on the man who had dared to thwart their plans.

They locked him in a room adjoining that in which Contraras was presiding over the deliberations of his five trusted lieutenants. After locking him in securely, Somoza went to report the matter to Moreno. His colleague, the other Biscayan fisherman, remained on guard outside the closed door, for fear of untoward accidents. Rossett was a powerful man.

Contraras, with his fine intellectual face, his hair in places turning from iron-grey to white, looked the embodiment of dignified justice. Perhaps, in his warped and fanatical mind, he believed he was.

He spoke in his most judicial accents. "Nobody shall ever say that he has not had a fair trial, when brought up before the tribunal of the brotherhood. We will wait an hour, if it is necessary, for this misguided young man to recover his senses." Moreno, who had arrived the last of the party, looked round with a sudden start. "Where is our comrade, Violet Hargrave?"

Contraras hastened to explain. "Ah! of course you have not heard. Alvedero went to bring her here, according to arrangement. He found her stretched on the sofa, motionless and inanimate. He thinks she is in a dying condition. He is going round to inquire after these proceedings are over."

"This is very sad," said Moreno, in his gravest manner. "And she is such a nice woman personally, and so devoted to the Cause, through the influence of Jaques. I wonder," – he cast an inquiring look at Alvedero – "if, by any chance, she drinks or drugs. Many apparently nice women do!" Alvedero shook his big head. "I

doubt it. I should say a seizure of some sort. Perhaps her heart is weak. She looks a little fragile.”

Moreno, for obvious reasons, did not pursue the subject. Violet Hargrave's absence had evidently excited no comment, no suspicion.

A quarter of an hour had elapsed. Somoza was deputed to enter the locked room and ascertain the condition of the prisoner. Contraras was resolved to proceed justly, according to his interpretation of the word justice.

Somoza returned after his inspection, and reported that the effects of the saturated handkerchief had worn off. Guy Rossett was in a sense clothed in his right mind. He was fit to face the tribunal.

The members of the conclave assumed masks. Somoza had worn a mask when he had entered the locked room. Whatever happened, it was essential that Guy Rossett should not be able to identify any one of them.

The prisoner, or captive, whatever he might be called, was brought in. In the cab he had been bound securely round the legs and wrists, but not painfully. He was assisted to a chair by the masked Somoza, where he sat facing his judges.

His face was a little pale, due to the effects of the chloroform, but his demeanour was firm. He felt himself in a very tight corner, but he had been assured so often by Moreno that he need never despair. A good angel, in the shape of Moreno himself, was watching over him.

He cast his glance rapidly over the masked men confronting him. Where was the black-browed young journalist whom he had known in old days?

Yes, there on the right, nearest to the door. Had that position been chosen by accident or design? He recognised at once the short, squat figure. Through the holes of the mask, he could see the gleam of those dark eyes. His demeanour would be more indomitable than ever.

Contraras opened the proceedings in his most judicial manner.

“Mr Rossett, you will recognise that you are now at the mercy of the brotherhood, against whom for some time you have directed your activities.”

“Quite true,” replied Guy Rossett in his curtest manner. Whatever fate was in store for him, he was not going to knuckle under to this crew of bloodthirsty ruffians.

Contraras continued in his calm, imperturbable manner.

“I cannot say that, up to the present, you have done us very much harm, but still you are a menace to our schemes, our aspirations.”

“I am pleased to hear that I am of sufficient importance to justify this mock tribunal.” Rossett waved his hand contemptuously at the masked men sitting in judgment on him.

The eyes of Contraras flashed through his mask. He took his position very seriously.

“Mr Rossett, let me advise you, in your own interests, not

to carry matters with too high a hand. Kindly recognise your position. If you were seated in the Calle Fernando el Santo, I admit you would be top dog. At the present moment the brotherhood, here in this obscure house, in this obscure quarter of the city of Madrid, is in that enviable situation.”

A bitter retort was on Rossett’s lips, but he thought he perceived an almost imperceptible gesture of warning from the short, squat figure in the corner near the door. He temporised.

“The fortunes of war, I admit, are with you, sir. I am sorry I have not the advantage of knowing whom I have the honour to address.”

Contraras was, at heart, a gentleman. He felt the sting of the rebuke.

“Mr Rossett, if you come into line with us to-night, I may deal with you quite frankly. Before we separate, you may know as much about me as I do about you.”

There was an obvious movement on the part of Zorrilita and Alvedero. They evidently thought their chief was going too far.

Contraras hushed the incipient rebellion with an authoritative wave of his hand.

“Gentlemen, kindly leave me to deal with this matter. Mr Rossett and I will understand each other in a very few moments.”

He turned towards the young diplomatist, still undaunted in the midst of this hostile crowd.

“Mr Rossett, you have much to lose by opposing us – perhaps life itself. By withdrawing from this unequal contest – and,

believe me, it is unequal – you have much to gain.”

“I am not so sure it is unequal,” answered Guy Rossett stubbornly. He had perceived too late the warning signal of Moreno, anxious that the somewhat uncertain Contraras should not be deflected from his present calm, judicial mood.

But Contraras kept his temper. “Mr Rossett, you are a young man, with life, a happy and prosperous life, before you. I know a great deal about you; it is my business to know much about other people. You are engaged to a very charming girl, you will inherit a great fortune from a wealthy aunt.”

“And, if you could establish your principles,” broke in Guy, speaking with some heat, “you might take away from me my fiancée – you would certainly rob me of my fortune.”

But Contraras was still patient. He was trying to reason with this obstinate young man, whose bold bearing moved his admiration.

“We cannot tell how the great Revolution will shape itself ultimately. But let us deal with present facts. A charming girl is waiting for you, longing for the moment when she can be your wife.”

A shadow of pain passed over Guy’s face. To-night, he had set out to visit his beloved Isobel, and he had been snared.

Contraras watched him narrowly through the holes of his mask.

“And a big fortune will be yours very shortly. Are you prepared to give up these advantages for the sake of thwarting

the brotherhood?”

“I rather think I am. But tell me what you propose. I admit you are arguing in a most temperate fashion. But you have something up your sleeve all the time.”

“I have,” admitted Contraras frankly. “Mr Rossett, believe me, I have no personal animosity against you, except as the tool of a decaying and effete system. Come into line with me, and your bonds shall be loosed, and you shall go forth a free man.”

“Your conditions?” queried Rossett, in a hard voice.

“Take your solemn oath, no, give me your word as an English gentleman – I will accept that – that you will resign your position at the Embassy, and take no further action against the brotherhood.”

He rose, and pointed at the door. “Give me that promise, Mr Rossett, and you can walk out a free man.”

If Guy hesitated a moment, his hesitation must be pardoned. In that swift instant he thought of Isobel, anxiously waiting his arrival, his dear sister Mary, anxious and troubled also, even his father, whose maladroit interference in his affairs had sent him into this hotbed of disaffection.

Then he spoke slowly and deliberately. “You invite me to dishonour myself, in order to secure my own personal safety. My answer is, *No*. Do your worst.”

“You will not reconsider that decision, Mr Rossett?”

Guy shook his head. “No, a thousand times, no. Do what you like with me. I am a defenceless man. You can murder me here,

and probably hush up your crime. But I shall be avenged – you can reckon on that.”

Contraras rose, and paced the room in great agitation. He was a brave man himself; he admired the quality of bravery in others. Fanatical and resolute as he was, it went against the grain to condemn this young Englishman to death, because he would not accept the dishonourable terms offered to him.

“Mr Rossett, I wish to spare you. The brotherhood does not condemn in haste.” He turned to Somoza. “Take this gentleman to his room, and bring him here in a quarter of an hour. Perhaps, by that time, he will take a more reasonable view of his position.”

“Come, señor, if you please,” said the obedient Somoza, speaking through his mask in the most polite accents. A Spaniard is always courteous, even if he is about to murder you.

The fisherman bent down to assist his prisoner to rise, but before Rossett was firmly on his legs, the short, squat figure of Moreno got up from his chair. He laid his finger to his lips and looked round at the assembly.

“Silence, gentlemen, for a moment! I am sure I heard the sound of a whistle. Yes, there is another one. Did you catch it?”

No, nobody had caught it, except Moreno. He stole gently to the window, and pulled the blind an inch aside. He dropped it hastily, and staggered back in a state of extreme agitation. In that apparently unconscious movement he had drawn nearer to the door.

“*Dios!*” he cried, in a shrill voice. “The house is surrounded.

There are dozens of men outside.”

The pulling aside of the blind was a signal he had arranged with his friend, the head of the Police. The pretence of the whistle was a blind.

There was a heavy trampling on the stairs. Almost before he had ceased speaking, the locked door was burst open to admit the members of the police, with levelled revolvers covering the masked men.

Two of the unwelcome visitors seized Somoza and handcuffed him. A third cut the secure but not painful ropes that bound Rossett, and conducted him down the narrow staircase.

A cab was waiting; his guardian bundled the young man in.

Was it a dream? Isobel's soft arms were round him, Isobel's soft voice was whispering to him.

“My darling, you are safe. Moreno has kept his promise.”

Rossett was bewildered. No wonder! He had hardly yet recovered from the effects of the drug which had been administered by Somoza. His head fell back on her shoulder.

“Isobel, my dear sweetheart! You here! What does it mean?”

“It means that you are saved through Moreno, and my cousin Maurice Farquhar.” She felt it was no time to palter with the truth.

“Your cousin, Maurice Farquhar! What has he to do with it all?”

She was pleased to note that there was no suspicion in his tones, only the expression of bewilderment.

“Oh, it would take hours to explain, but I will cut it as short as I can. My cousin and Moreno are great friends. Maurice has come over here to help him. I was expecting you to-night, as you will remember. Maurice came round to explain that you had been kidnapped. He was coming on here, as Moreno’s lieutenant, to help the police. I implored him to take me along, to welcome you when you escaped from them. He consented, and here I am.”

Guy clasped her in his arms. “You darling! And where is Mr Farquhar? I would like to thank him.”

Isobel beckoned to a man standing a little way in the shadow. He advanced.

“Maurice, Guy wishes to thank you for all your share in this night’s work.”

The two men exchanged a cordial handshake. Guy muttered his thanks.

“I would like to tell you to drive off straight away,” said Farquhar. “But you must wait a minute or two. There will be a third occupant of this vehicle – our friend Moreno, who is going to pass the night at the house of the Chief of Police. To-morrow he will go to England.”

In the room from which Rossett had been conducted to his friendly guardian, the head of the police was taking the situation in hand.

“Masks off, if you please, gentlemen,” he cried out in stentorian tones.

The men turned hesitatingly to each other. But the levelled

revolvers had an eloquence that was very appealing. They tore off their masks and flung them on the floor.

The chief scrutinised them in turn, offering audible comments.

“Ah, Contraras, the dark horse of the conspiracy, connected with the Spanish nobility through your wife. I think I have met you at the Court. Alvedero – ah, for some time you have been suspect. Zorrilta, I know you well. Governor of the Province of Navarre.”

He pointed to Somoza. “This gentleman I do not know. We shall find something about him later on.”

He turned to Moreno, who preserved an impassive demeanour.

“I have not the honour of knowing this gentleman, either,” he said with a splendid disregard of the truth, for which Moreno admired him immensely. “But no doubt I shall shortly atone for my ignorance. I shall have something to say to him later on.”

He turned to his subordinates. “Handcuff them and take them along.”

Moreno all the time had been edging nearer to the door. Suddenly he pulled out a knife, and hurled himself at the man who was guarding it. The man went down before the apparently savage onslaught. Moreno rushed down the stairs.

“After him,” yelled the Chief. “Don’t let that man escape.”

Three of the waiting men clattered down the stairs after the flying Moreno. They returned a few moments later, crestfallen.

They explained that he had flown like the wind, that they had lost him in the darkness.

The Chief swore roundly, and cursed them. "Dolts, idiots!" he cried fiercely. "You have let him slip through your fingers. I believe he is the most dangerous man of the lot."

He was certainly playing his part splendidly. It had, of course, all been rehearsed. The man on whom Moreno had sprung had fallen down of his own accord. The men who had been dispatched to pursue him had lost him on purpose.

Farquhar met him at the door of the shabby house and piloted him to the cab in which Guy Rossett and Isobel were seated.

"Here is the third passenger," he said. Moreno got in and looked triumphantly at the two. "Well, what do you think of the English Secret Service?" he cried in exultant tones. "Mr Rossett is saved, I have escaped without suspicion, and my good friend the Chief of Police will make a splendid haul upstairs. He played up splendidly. Well, I think, after to-night the anarchist movement will have a big set-back in Spain."

The cab drove along. Isobel was deposited at the Godwins'. Rossett was put down at his own flat. Moreno was conveyed to the residence of the Chief of Police, where he was to pass the night.

A telegram was awaiting Guy. It was from his sister Mary.

"I was summoned to Aunt Henrietta this morning. She had passed away before I arrived."

Chapter Twenty Three

The next morning Guy Rossett and Farquhar were admitted to a private audience of the King. A gracious message had been transmitted to Moreno through the agency of the Chief of Police. It would not have been very politic on the part of that enterprising young man to show himself at the Palace.

His Majesty thanked them both warmly for their services, and was very interested in the details which they gave him of that eventful evening.

“I know England well, and love it,” he said. “As long as she breeds such sons as you, she will always remain the first of great nations. Last night’s work was good. My poor country will have a more peaceful time now that we have laid these bloodthirsty scoundrels by the heels.”

Moreno’s overpowering impulse was to get back to England as quickly as possible. But there was a certain duty to perform first. He must pay his promised visit to Violet Hargrave.

He called about eleven o’clock. He found her looking pale and languid from the effects of the powerful mixture he had given her.

“Pulling round?” he inquired as they shook hands. “I can see you are, but you won’t be quite yourself for a few hours. Well, tell me what happened. I arrived late at the meeting, and simply heard from Contraras that Alvedero had reported you

were indisposed. But I learned no details, and, of course, did not press for any. Did they fetch a doctor to you? If so, what is his verdict?"

A faint smile spread over her pale face.

"He has only left a few minutes ago. He came to the conclusion that I dosed myself with drugs. I allowed him to believe that I did. Of course, I have never drugged in my life."

"A very clever man, an ornament to his profession," remarked Moreno drily. "Still, how the devil should he guess, being totally ignorant of the circumstances? And the symptoms were precisely those which would have been produced by a long course of drugging."

Mrs Hargrave laid her hand upon his arm, and spoke in a serious voice.

"What of last night? There is nothing in the papers this morning. I have sent out for half a dozen. Tell me what happened."

"The brotherhood has been defeated again." He rehearsed the scene for her benefit, and came to the concluding portion.

"Just as they were about to remove Rossett, I distinctly heard a low whistle, that was repeated a few seconds later. I just pulled aside the curtain, and saw that the house was surrounded. I had hardly put the blind back when the door was burst open and the police swarmed in. They cut Rossett loose and took him downstairs. They covered us with revolvers, and made us take off our masks. The Chief who was with them recognised

Contraras, Zorrilta, and Alvedero. Myself and Somoza he did not recognise.”

“Ah!” Violet Hargrave drew a long breath. “You were the only one who escaped, then? How did you manage it?”

“By a miracle. I always keep my head in a crisis. As soon as I heard them rushing up the stairs, I drew near to the door, hoping to escape in the confusion. It was, of course, a thousand to one chance. While all the attention was being concentrated on Contraras and the others – of course the Chief didn’t expect to bag such a big game – I drew my knife, plunged it into the breast of the man guarding the door – I fear I killed him, poor fellow – flew down the stairs, knocked over another chap, and dodged through them.”

Violet Hargrave surveyed him critically. “I am afraid you haven’t a very high opinion of my intelligence. That is the story you will tell to Luçue, Maceda, and Jaques when we meet again in London. It does not impose upon me. You have escaped right enough, but you escaped with the connivance of the police.”

Moreno bit his lip; he had presumed a little too much upon feminine incredulity.

“At any rate, you are not in their clutches,” he said quietly. “I saved you. Don’t forget that.”

She reached out her hand. “Please forgive me. I am very grateful for what you have done. Of course, if I had gone there you could not have saved me. I should have been taken with the others. You could save Guy Rossett and yourself, even your

clever brain could not have taken in a third. I repeat, I am very grateful.”

Moreno retained her hand in his. Secretive as he was by nature, he felt that the time for dissimulation was past.

“When we get to London – I am leaving to-night, and the sooner we make tracks the better – we will respect each other’s secrets. I have still in my possession the photographed copy of that document which you sold to Guy Rossett.”

She drew away her hand from his with an indignant gesture.

“Oh, you think I am utterly, irretrievably base!” she cried bitterly. “You think I would betray you, after what you have done for me, saved me from death or a life-long imprisonment.” She broke into wild sobbing.

He put his arm round her, and drew her gently towards him, till her crying ceased.

“My poor little Violet,” he whispered gently. “Let us speak together quite frankly. You are, on your own showing, an adventuress, with, I believe, some very womanly instincts. Well, I am not quite sure that I am very much better. You sold the Cause for money. I sold it for money, too, plus conviction. I wonder if we could turn over a new leaf, lead a new life together?”

“If I could find somebody who really cared for me,” cried the pretty little blonde woman, still tearful. “Jaques loves me, I am sure, but just with the love of a father.”

“Well, I care for you,” said Moreno, and this time he spoke without any reservation.

Violet lifted her face to his, and their lips met. Then she shivered.

“But how can we escape from this horrible brotherhood? Luçue and Jaques are left. They will exact their pound of flesh. They will snare us into equally dangerous enterprises.”

Moreno snapped his fingers. “Bah! If I have outwitted Contraras and the others, I will soon settle Luçue’s hash. As to poor old Jaques, it won’t take long to convince him that he is more safely employed in earning a hundred per cent, on his capital than in trying to blow up respectable people who have certainly never injured him. The fate of the others will frighten him.”

Violet drew herself from his protecting arm, and dried her eyes.

“I think, dear, I can really turn into a good woman,” she said plaintively. “You see, I have never had a proper chance. When I married Jack, and I was genuinely fond of him, I thought I had met a gentleman. Can you guess what he really was?”

“A card-sharper?” suggested Moreno, with his uncanny facility of guessing conundrums.

Mrs Hargrave nodded her blonde head.

“You have hit it. A week after we were married he told me all about himself. We were to take an expensive flat in Mount Street, and he would bring people there. He spent three weeks in teaching me an elaborate system of signalling. As a rule, we played together, but he had another couple of confederates to ward off suspicion.”

“Did you tell Jaques of this?”

“No, I was too ashamed. Jaques is, of course, a rogue in his own way, but not that way. He was opposed to the marriage at first, and I was keen on it. I made out that Jack was a man of good family, and well-off. I believed all he told me at the start. I didn’t want to own that I had been taken in.”

“I quite understand,” replied Moreno. “By the way, of course you didn’t know that poor old Contraras is dead.”

“Contraras dead? How did he die?”

“It appears that he always carried some poisoned tablets in his pocket in case of accidents. Before they handcuffed him – they are a bit slower here than in Paris or London – he swallowed one of them, and died as they took him downstairs. Poor old man! He was a terrible fanatic, but he was more honest than most of them. I don’t suppose there will be much mourning in Fitzjohn’s Avenue. I expect his family will be glad to have got rid of him.”

He kissed her very tenderly, as he bade her good-bye.

“A new life, little woman, from to-day?”

“A new life from to-day,” she repeated softly, “as long as I am sure that you really care.”

“I do care,” replied Moreno, speaking with unusual fervour for a man of his cautious temperament.

Of the London section of the brotherhood little remains to be told. Shortly afterwards Luque was stabbed to death in a violent quarrel with a brother anarchist. Jaques and Maceda, alarmed at the fate of their Spanish colleagues, took but a perfunctory

part in further propaganda. In twelve months' time the London section had ceased to exist as an active force.

On a mellow October day, a few months after those thrilling events in Madrid, Isobel was married in the quiet little church on her uncle's estates. It was in this church that her father had been christened. Her bridesmaids were Lady Mary and two cousins. Her uncle, the head of the family, gave her away.

For the Head of the Family and his wife had behaved quite properly on the occasion. They had insisted that she should be married from their house, that she should have the whole-hearted support of her kindred.

Such an arrangement suited her very well. Her bereavement had been so recent that the idea of a fashionable wedding would have been repugnant to her. Here in this quiet little church, where generations of Clandons had been christened, many of them married, she gave herself to the man of her choice.

With the advent of his great-aunt's considerable fortune, Guy's brief fit of ambition died out. And it must be admitted that, although he had stuck gallantly to his post, and refused to show the white feather, his experience of diplomatic life had been more exciting than pleasant. So he severed his connection with the Foreign Office, having made up his mind to lead the easy and agreeable life of a man of wealth and position.

They were to spend their honeymoon in Italy. On their return, they would renovate Aunt Henrietta's charming country residence in Hampshire and take a house in London, where they

intended to spend a good deal of their time.

For Guy was very proud of his beautiful Isobel, and he could see a time when she would become a very charming and popular hostess.

The young couple drove away amidst the cordial greetings of the small company assembled. Only a few intimate connections of the two families were present.

Moreno had been invited, but he had excused himself on some plausible pretext. He had no desire to thrust himself into an aristocratic *milieu*, to which he was unaccustomed. He sent the bride a very handsome present, with a card on which was written: "From Andres Moreno, as a souvenir of thrilling times in Spain."

While Lord Saxham was saying good-bye to the Clandons, Maurice Farquhar conducted Lady Mary to the car which was to drive them back to Ticehurst Park, a distance of about fifty miles.

"You will not forget that you are due to us on the twenty-fifth," she reminded him as they shook hands.

"Is it likely? I have been looking forward to it ever since you sent me the invitation."

"I am looking forward to it, too," said Mary softly, and a rather becoming colour swept over her cheek, making her look quite attractive.

The Earl joined them and mounted the car. He waved his hand cheerfully as they drove off. "Not good-bye, but *au revoir*, Farquhar. See you on the twenty-fifth."

He watched the car drive out of sight, thinking of many things. He had loved Isobel with all the fervour of first love, but Isobel was gone from him. And Mary was very sweet and attractive, and took no pains to conceal that she took great pleasure in his society. Well – perhaps some day!

But even in his secret thought the young and ambitious barrister could hardly bring himself to believe that a girl of Mary's birth and long descent would give herself to a man who had only his brains to recommend him.

Still, this younger generation of the Rossetts had a strange democratic strain in them. Guy had chosen his bride from the small squirearchy. It was openly rumoured in the clubs that, having come into a snug little income from great-aunt Henrietta, Lord Ticehurst had made up his mind to marry his chorus-girl, and defy his father.

Lady Mary had also been well provided for from the same kind source. She might prove as democratic as the others.

And, while Farquhar was ruminating over all these things, Isobel and her husband had set out on the first stage of their journey to the enchanted land of wedded romance.

The End