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THE GOLDEN LOTUS
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

BY

ALFRED BARRETT

LONDON
JOHN MACQUEEN
49 RUPERT STREET, W.
1901
To

MY WIFE
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The Golden Lotus

CHAPTER I

PARIS

Paris again! Paris! The Queen of Cities at last, after years spent in waste places of the earth. Twinkling, dancing boulevards and avenues after brown, tussock-covered plains! Brilliant shops after tin-roofed stores! The Bois after the Bush! How pleasant even are the bare black trunks of the autumn-stripped chestnuts after those eternal wattles and blue gums, and how jolly to be in Europe once more!

But I've wasted five years of my life, nevertheless, to arrive at this conclusion—five years' bullock-driving, farming, store-keeping, gold-mining—and here I am back again with the six hundred a year my father left me when he died; no more, no less. I
have given those years of my life (let me see, I was twenty-five when I inherited the money which I intended—ah, vanity!—should be the nucleus of my future fortunes—I am thirty now), I have given those years for what? For a bronzed complexion, a constitution that will stand any amount of exposure, a wider knowledge of a certain class of my fellowmen, and a firm resolve to give the Colonies, for the future, a wide berth, to renounce the torments of ambition, and to settle down and make use of my income to purchase for me selfish ease. Was it worth it? I mean, is the result I have obtained worth those lost years? I doubt it. The bronze on my features will soon fade to the pallor of the dweller in cities; there will, if I can help it, be few hardships now for my constitution to endure, and my knowledge of character, gained by long contact with all the weird crew of not-wanted-at-homes, will help me little with the men I am likely to meet in future.

It seems that there remains only the resolve to be comfortable then. Is that worth five years of striving, restless ambition, disappointed hopes?—worth home ties broken, friendships forgotten?
PARIS

At anyrate, I have commenced my new life well. From the day the Messageries Maritime advertisement caught my eye in Sydney, with its flaming 'Paris via Mar- seilles,' and the whiff of the boulevards came to me, I feel that I have lived. The voyage home alone, with the halts at Naples and Colombo, was delightful; the first few days at the Bristol, while I sought my future pied-a-terre, were Elysian; and now at last here I am, with my household gods installed, my gas-fire lighted, my lattice shutters fastened, my feet in slippers, a garçon in the one city in the world where it is good to be a garçon (even if one be an Englishman), in a little flat up five flights of stairs in the Rue Tronchet 'at the back of the Madeleine.'

Let me describe my flat. Those stairs once scaled—there is no lift—you arrive at a landing, from which two doors afford entrance to the pair of flats occupying the fifth floor of the building. The portal on the left hand is my own; the other my neighbour's (a Mdlle. Durand, my concierge tells me, a young lady très comme-il-faut, also très belle—his Parisian old eye twinkles, but with respect—who dwells there with her maid).
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

Entering my apartment, and looking across the hall, you see a bedroom, a dark little room with a window on the court. On the right hand is the salon, a cheery spot with two windows looking over the wide street, and a balcony from which the grand edifice of the Madeleine may be seen rising dark and majestic against the sky-line.

The whole flat, two rooms and a hall, is honeycombed with cupboards and ornée de glaces according to the most approved (French) methods.

Here, among my cupboards and glaces, I live calm and undistracted. I have no housekeeper, no man, no worries. The wife of my concierge, for a consideration, makes my bed and does my rooms. I let her in carefully in the morning about nine, and show her out again as soon as her work is done (the old soul is garrulous, but I am not), and from that moment my day is my own. I have a choice of many cafés where I can breakfast, lunch and dine, or, should I feel lazy, a brisk waiter from a neighbouring restaurant will flash four courses into my chambers and whisk the empty dishes away again for a very small pourboire. I can sit at home, read, write or smoke. I can
flâner on the boulevards, I can bicycle to the Châlet du Cycle, skate in the Palais de Glace, or hire a horse and, speeding through the Bois, imagine myself again on the old stock-horse rounding up cattle at Warrawarrawarrara.

Surely if there is peace to be found on this earth, my heart, which is humble, may look for it under the present circumstances. And peace, after so many years of knocking about, so many ups and downs, is a thing I feel I need.
CHAPTER II

AN ADVENTURE

I THINK the last page I wrote contained that politic word 'if.' It is only a week since I wrote it, and already I have reason to fear that my peace has taken to itself wings and fled.

An adventure has occurred to me which, strange as the idea appears even to myself as I write, seems likely to change the course of my existence. I have seen the woman I am going to marry!

Yes, I, who have thought little of women till now, whose heart love, save in its mildest shape—a flirtation in a Sydney ball-room, a glance and a word with some Bush beauty—has never even troubled, have seen the woman who henceforth I feel is to be the one woman in the world for me: seen her while she is yet ignorant of my existence: seen her, unseen, under such strange conditions, amidst such mysterious circumstances as still cause my
AN ADVENTURE

heart to thrill and my pulse to throb, even while a feeling that is half doubt, half wonder bids me hesitate ere it is too late.

It happened in this way.

I have said that my little flat, according to established French custom, is honeycombed with cupboards. In my salon there are two of these receptacles; and in one of them, let into the partition wall which divides my neighbour's flat from mine, I have placed my wines and cigars.

Yesterday, a dull November day, I spent for the most part in the house. I had been reading a very fascinating novel by Mendés and doing a little writing. Towards evening I roused myself from the armchair, in front of my gas-fire, where I had dozed off watching the little rows of asbestos coals whose glowing shapes grinned at me companionably through the bars like little skulls, and I prepared myself to stroll dinner-wards.

The day, as I could see from my window, had closed gloomily in rain and fog, and with a shiver I turned to my cupboard for a glass of Vermouth to take me through the cold.

Opening the door, I gazed around for a moment, and then stepped forward wonderingly. I had not yet lighted my lamp, and
save for the red glow of the fire, whose rays did not certainly penetrate beyond the centre of the room, the salon was in darkness. Yet from this cupboard there was stealing a thin, bright ray of light which almost dazzled me as it pierced the shadows.

Where did it come from? I raised myself on a chair to investigate. And then I smiled, even while I yet pondered, for pierced in the partition wall at the back of the topmost shelf there were several tiny holes, and the ray, or rays of light which had so puzzled me streamed through them from the next apartment.

Standing on a chair, as I was, I found my eyes on a level with these holes, and almost involuntarily, with a queer ‘Alice-through-the-Looking-Glass’ sensation, I bent forward and gazed into the room beyond.

Another second and I started and almost lost my balance, for at that moment—beneath my very nose as it seemed to me—a woman rose to her feet and came suddenly into view. In her appearance there was nothing remarkable—she was a peasant woman, a servant probably, of forty-five or fifty, with a brown wrinkled face surmounted by a quaint Breton cap—and had I chosen any other hour in the twenty-four for my peeping, in all probability
a glance would have satisfied me and my adventure have remained unwritten; but what struck me at once about this woman, and riveted my gaze to her, was her evident and terrible agitation.

She must have been seated, I imagined, crouched up in a chair against the wall beneath me, and, driven from that position by the restlessness written on her face and gestures, sought refuge in a fevered pacing of the room.

Up and down the woman strode, the tears streaming from her eyes and her lips working convulsively, while now and again she glanced wildly up at the little clock ticking above the mantelpiece, and turned an eager ear to the door, as though she were awaiting the arrival of one whose coming must mean life or death to her.

By-and-by this strange woman sank again into her chair, and, my sympathies being now thoroughly aroused, I let my eyes wander round the apartment, as if from the dumb evidence of its appointments I might gain some clue to her behaviour.

The room that I looked down on was a sitting-room. It was plainly, even poorly, furnished, yet there was an air of refinement
about it, and a graceful arrangement of its pretty trifles that seemed to bespeak a feminine touch—Mdllle. Durand's, of course. Over the mantelpiece, where ticked the little clock which the woman watched so anxiously, there hung the portrait of a handsome man of middle age, in the uniform of an English regiment. On the wall, almost immediately beneath my gaze, I could just see, by straining my eyes, the head of a great ivory crucifix. A little desk with a few papers scattered about on it stood under the window on the left. There appeared to be nothing else of any importance to give me a clue to the tastes or condition of my neighbours.

The woman rose again and halted opposite the clock. 'Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!' I heard her murmur. 'What can have happened to her? It is only four miles from here, and the hour is now ten—ah, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!'

Ten o'clock? I must have dozed longer than I had imagined! Presently the woman gave a start and turned eagerly to the door, her face brightening. Then with a cry, and darting forward, she flung it open wide.

I gasped. On the threshold stood the loveliest girl I have ever seen. Tall and
AN ADVENTURE

dark, with a graceful, lofty figure, her face with its perfect contour pale as death, her glorious dark eyes staring in front of her with an expression of fear that was almost horror, she rested for a moment motionless, as if in the act of listening. Then, half-staggering, she rushed into the arms of the elder woman, who, with a glad cry of 'At last, Ma'mzelle Madeleine! Ah, how I have feared for you!' hastened to support her to a chair, kneeling afterwards by her side and chafing her small white hands.

It was only then—so fascinated had I been by the beauty of her face—that I commenced to notice something strange about the appearance of this lovely girl. Her hands, evidently, by nature were small and white, but to my amazement I saw them covered now with mud, and noticed that not alone her hands, but her little boots, and even her dress, bore the marks of green turf and slimy mould. Her hair, which was heavy and black, hung dishevelled almost to her waist, and her little doeskin gloves, which she clutched in her fingers were torn to ribbons.

For a moment or two the younger woman rested in the chair, apparently inattentive to the affectionate murmurs of the elder, then
she rose, and moving across the room to
where the crucifix hung against the wall
beneath me, she flung herself on her knees
before it and buried her head in her hands,
 motionless.

Even while I gazed, spellbound, the sight
of her devotion recalled me to myself, and
with a last glance of wondering admiration I
descended from my chair and closed the
cupboard door.
CHAPTER III

A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

On the day following my rather romantic adventure in my rooms, I confess I took more pleasure in recalling to my recollection the wonderful beauty of my neighbour, Mdle. Durand, than in attempting any explanation of the strange scene I had witnessed. For what a lovely face was hers! Tear-stained, pale, even with the terror in those lovely eyes, how it haunted me—still haunts me! I have seen beauties of most races in my time, but she stands alone. Yes, as her beauty is not of the ordinary kind, so she herself is not of the common run—I feel assured of that. The emotions I had seen her a prey to were not the consequence of the burlesque finish to some vulgar intrigue, or physiognomy is but a meaningless farce. Yet . . . what did it mean, that scene? what that return?
All this has been recalled to my thoughts with tenfold power during the last two days (in which I have caught no further glimpse of my neighbour) by a chain of incidents which connects itself with the former affair by some queer, impalpable link, the cause for whose existence I cannot explain — whose force I combat, yet whose persistence I am unable to strive against. But let me explain.

After a restless night and a day filled with contradictory desires, in despair at length I seized my hat and left the house, intending to dine early and seek relaxation from my thoughts in a few hours spent at the Casino, or some other home of the wilder kind of gaiety.

I was accustomed to take my dinner at a small café in a street not far from the Church of the Madeleine, and on this particular evening I strolled into the well-lighted room and seated myself at my usual table almost without thought. The waiter, after receiving my orders, handed me the evening paper and bustled off, while I carelessly glanced through the sheet, taking little interest in the rabid anti-Semitism of its editor, or the account of a stormy discussion in the Chamber of the day previous.
Suddenly, however, my eye was attracted by a small paragraph half-hidden away among the advertisements and municipal news, and I remained staring vaguely into space while my soup grew cold and the waiter hovered uneasily round me attempting to catch my eye.

The man's actions at length recalled me to myself, and dismissing my thoughts with a shrug and a laugh, I put the journal aside and turned to my dinner. When I had completed it I ordered a cigar and, striking a light, strolled out on to the Boulevard des Italiens.

I had traversed some distance and smoked half my weed before I became aware that my mind would not be coerced into dismissing that unlucky paragraph from its attention; so, buying another copy of the paper from a passing boy, I seated myself at one of the small zinc tables outside an adjacent restaurant, and ordering a liqueur, I examined afresh the lines which had so startled me.

This is how they ran:

"Last night, between eight and half-past, the attention of one of the guardians of the Cemetery of Montrouje was attracted to the
fact that an attempt had been made upon one of the graves under his charge. The enterprise had evidently been commenced but a short time previous to the hour at which he is accustomed to make his rounds. The malefactors, whoever they might have been, had, we are happy to say, either failed in, or abandoned, their attempt. Probably the sound of the guardian's arrival had disturbed them at their nefarious work, or possibly they had neglected to supply themselves with the tools necessary to complete their task.

'It is difficult to form any theory to account for this strange occurrence, as the grave which was the object of attention is an old one, of a date, indeed, considerably anterior to 1870, and it bears no monument, the latter having in all probability been destroyed, with many others, during the war and the Commune riots which followed. An extra guard will be kept for the present in the neighbourhood.'

Now, what connection could there be between this trivial or horrible (it might be either) affair and the scene I had witnessed in my neighbour's room the night before? Again and again I told myself there could
be none. Yet again and again I found myself revolving the two episodes together in my brain, comparing details, pondering over incidents, and forming theories, wild and improbable, and each one wilder and more improbable than the last.

I seemed to see once more the old servant pacing the room, to all appearances half mad with anxiety. I saw the door open and the young girl appear on the threshold, that fear that was almost horror in her lovely eyes. I saw her gloves torn to ribbons clutched in her trembling fingers, and her hands, her boots, her dress even, stained with that green and slimy mould. Again the affair to which this paragraph referred had taken place apparently about eight in the evening. She had returned at ten. And I recalled the old woman's anxious murmur, 'It is only four miles, and the hour is now ten.' Montrouje is, as far as I can make out, about four miles distant from the Madeleine! ... I saw the stricken girl cast herself at the foot of the cross with wild despairing eyes upturned. ... Oh, I was mad! I tore the paper into fragments and flung them under the table.

But my evening was spoiled. I forgot
my planned amusements and returned home.

To-night as I entered the hall I happened to knock against a man who had been hastily descending the last few stairs, and who touched his hat carelessly in reply to my apology, giving me a sharp glance as he made his way out.

As I passed on and prepared to mount the steps, I heard the voice of my concierge calling to me, and I stopped.

He came panting after me. ‘Monsieur! Monsieur! Did monsieur see the doctor—the Doctor Denver—just now?’

‘Doctor Denver? No. I do not know him. Who is he?’

‘But Doctor Denver, monsieur, the gentleman who had monsieur’s rooms for a short time before monsieur came! The gentleman who has just gone out!’

‘I did see someone go out as I came in,’ I returned. ‘Doctor Denver, eh? Well, what of him?’

‘Ah! he wished to see monsieur. It seems he gave up his rooms too quickly. He has changed his mind. He wished to see you about them, monsieur! He thought that, being compatriots, you might possibly
be able to make some arrangements to . . . to permit him to take over the apartment again.'

'Did he? Very cool of him, considering that I have just furnished them and settled down. If he wished to return so soon, why did he not say so before?'

'Ah, monsieur! I fear that it is I who am to blame for that; at least, it appears so. Monsieur must excuse me, my memory is not what it was. It appears—though indeed I have no recollection of the matter—that the doctor warned me that he might return.'

'Well,' I returned impatiently, 'I cannot help that. He should have come back sooner.'

'Ah! yes, monsieur. But the doctor has been back once or twice. I fancied, however, that he had perhaps merely been to call on Mdlle. Durand. And . . . and, monsieur . . . it seems that the doctor did not give me the key of monsieur's apartment when he left. It is my key that monsieur now has.'

It appears that it is usual in Paris for a concierge to possess a duplicate key of all apartments under his care; but I did not fancy a stranger possessing the means of
entering my rooms in my absence, and I was annoyed. 'I have no intention of giving up the rooms at present,' I said coldly, 'and you must see that this key is returned at once.'

The old man, much confused evidently between his desires to serve two clients, bowed and made his way back to his little den in the hall, and I turned and continued my way upstairs thoughtfully.

This Doctor Denver had not even troubled to close my door after his visit to my rooms, I noticed, as I reached my landing—or he had been too pressed for time. I remembered to have locked the door when I went out, and this man, after making use of my key—to which he had no earthly right—had added insult to injury by leaving my dwelling-place open to the world.

For I felt certain that the fellow had been inside my apartment; and my suspicions became confirmed when I noticed that some papers which I had left on my table had been turned over hurriedly.

The next moment I received a shock. *The door of the cupboard near the fireplace stood open!* That was queer, surely! And yet, when I came to think it over, I was
not surprised. It was probable, even to the verge of certainty, that the former occupant of my chambers had contrived and utilised this means of spying upon my neighbours; and I had caught myself speculating several times as to his reasons and the kind of man he might be. It seemed that it was this man Denver. The fellow must have had unlimited cheek, or some burning reason, to thus venture back. I tried to recall his appearance, of which I had caught but a momentary glimpse in the half light of the hall, and I almost fancied I could place him again—a tall, dark fellow, with black moustache and handsome, dead-white face, who scowled at me as he passed.

Doctor Denver may know Mdlle. Durand, since the concierge imagined he had returned with the object of calling upon her, but it is hardly likely that they are friends, for in that case the fellow would not need to spy upon her. The whole affair seems dark.

I have tried to pass it off with a laugh and a shrug. I have told myself that I have only seen this strange girl once and for a moment; that my interest in her is likely to bring me at least as much pain as pleasure; that the relations these people
bear to one another are nothing, can be nothing, to me; that among romantic young beauties who dwell alone, and mysterious, nomadic doctors, the path to peace does not lie. It is useless. I am idle for the first time for several years. In spite of myself I bear a grudge against this spy upon an unprotected girl—this man who makes so coolly free with my rooms; and, struggle as I will against it, I have a stronger reason yet. Why? This girl is beautiful, but I am not a boy, and what I have yet seen of her is at least ambiguous. Nevertheless, it is there, and I begin to fear that my years of roughing it, while hardening one side of my nature have left another side singularly unprotected.

'Madeleine Durand!' As I repeat the name I find myself again drifting back to that mysterious paragraph, and my old doubts which connected that Montrouje affair with the strange horror in her lovely eyes when first she stood pale and trembling in the doorway of her room. And then this man Denver—this new arrival on the scene? What rôle in the mystery is his? He had vacated his apartment; therefore the reasons he had for watching this girl must, for the
time at least, have vanished. But suddenly he returns, greatly agitated by the news that his chambers are occupied. He ventures boldly upstairs, taking the risk—a great one—of my coming home suddenly, or even being already there. This is coincident almost with the mysterious occurrence at Montrouje and the scene that I witnessed in my neighbour's apartment.

Is it possible, I ask myself, to avoid seeing a connection between these events? and where does that conclusion lead me? Or is it chance merely that the past few hours have seen so much occur? Oh, it must be chance! What but the wildest imagination could connect that ghoulish affair at Montrouje with the girl whom I saw kneeling beneath the crucifix in prayer?

Yet the tie between her and this man Denver, at least, is present and not so easily explained.
CHAPTER IV

MDLLE. DURAND ILL

Some time before noon this morning I was aroused from a day-dream by a knock at my front door, and on opening it I found myself confronted by a small boy who bore on his arm a basket full of bottles.

'Mdlle. Durand's?' he queried.

'No. Mdlle. Durand lives there,' and I pointed in the direction of the neighbouring flat.

The boy was turning away when I stopped him. I had caught sight of the label on one of his bottles, and I noticed that it came from a chemist's shop on the Boulevard des Italiens. 'Mdlle. Durand is ill?' I asked suddenly.

'But evidently, monsieur,' he replied carelessly, 'since this medicine is for her.'

'Very ill?'

The lad grinned, at my tone, I imagine;
but he recovered as I produced a fifty centime piece from my pocket. 'I do not know,' he said. 'Doctor Louvet is prescribing for Mdlle. Durand. Perhaps he would tell monsieur, or—' he continued, making sure of the piece of silver, 'perhaps monsieur had better ask ma'mzelle herself.'

I managed to collar him as he went off. 'Doctor Louvet of where?' I asked sternly.

His tone changed. '182 Avenue D'Antin, monsieur,' he said quickly.

I released him, and he made his way across to the other flat, while I stood for a moment watching him with a faint hope that I might obtain a glimpse of my neighbours when the door should open to his knock.

But I had little to repay me for my trouble. My neighbours' portal did indeed yield to the boy's summons, but it was only sufficiently to permit the head of the old Breton woman to appear for a second. Then her hand emerged, grasped the bottle, and the door closed again.

I had hoped she might glance in my direction. As a neighbour I might perhaps, without presuming, have made inquiry concerning her young mistress's health, but she did not look my way, and vanished almost,
as it appeared to me, as if from the first she had unwillingly shown herself.

I paced my room irresolutely for a time, and then, an idea having struck me, I took up my hat and stick and made my way outside in the direction of the Avenue D'Antin.

At 182 I paused for a second a trifle nervously. But it was too late for retreat now, and making up my mind I mounted to the third floor of the building, where, as the concierge had informed me, Doctor Louvet dwelt.

As fortune would have it, the physician was disengaged, and I was shown immediately into a well-furnished consulting-room, where Monsieur Louvet himself, a kindly, white-haired old Frenchman, awaited me.

I do not suppose the old gentleman had ever in his life examined a healthier patient, and it is much to his credit that he contrived to prescribe for me as he did. I suspect that for the moment he put my call down to British eccentricity, and probably his medicine—which I may mention I never tasted—was of a strength proportionate to my disease.

After a time I snatched the opportunity afforded me by his writing at his desk to
broach the real subject of my visit. "By the way, Doctor Louvet," I said carelessly, "you have another patient in the house where I reside."

The doctor looked up inquiringly.

"My address is 204 Rue Tronchet," I continued.

"Indeed," he said, looking at me with interest. "Ah, yes! you mean Mdlle. Durand! Poor young lady! Poor young lady!"

"Is she very ill, then?" I gasped.

The old doctor gave me a quick glance and smiled slightly. I fear from that moment he had diagnosed my complaint. "No, monsieur, Heaven forbid!" he cried warmly. "A chill—that is all, mademoiselle has only a chill. A few days and she will be about again. But, poor girl (such a sweet young lady, monsieur!), there are worse things than bodily torments."

"You mean?"

"Are you a friend of mademoiselle, monsieur?"

I parried the question as best I could. "My feelings are most friendly towards her," I said. "Is she . . . has she other troubles?"
The doctor sighed and hesitated for a moment. 'I thought that you were perhaps an old friend of mademoiselle's,' he said, 'or that you might be acquainted with her family.'

'No, I am not an old friend,' I said, after a moment's thought, 'and I regret that I know nothing of her people. But if there were anything I could do . . . .'

'Monsieur,' said Doctor Louvet, kindly, 'I fear there is nothing you can do. In fact, I am not sure whether I have any right to discuss mademoiselle's affairs, which she has never mentioned to me. But if you, Mr' (glancing at my card) 'Carlton, as a neighbour, and as one who takes an interest in mademoiselle, could find her friends —her parents if she have any—you would, I feel sure, be doing her a very great service. Mdlle. Durand is very proud, and I think it probable that she has had some misunderstanding with her relatives. However, they could not, if they knew it, permit a young lady of her beauty and evident birth to suffer poverty and . . . .'

'Poverty?' I gasped.

The doctor sighed. 'In a young lady of her position that is what it comes to, I am afraid,' he said. 'We in my pro-
fession are quick to notice such things, and I had a little of the truth from mademoiselle's old servant, Madame Perpol, a faithful creature, monsieur, who seems to worship her young mistress. But in addition to this, if I am not in error, Mdlle. Durand is suffering at the present time from the effects of some shock or anxiety, and this, together with more vulgar troubles, may have a far more disastrous result than the slight illness which I have prescribed for. However, monsieur, at the first hint I gave of wishing to assist mademoiselle by any means in my power—as an old man, you understand, and a friend—I received my congé, and it was only through the exertions of the old servant that mademoiselle consented to recall me.'

'Is there no clue you could give me as to the whereabouts of Mdlle. Durand's relatives?' I asked. 'Do you know nothing at all of them?'

'Nothing whatever. As I have said, the young lady is very proud and reserved, and the subject is evidently a painful one. She has never spoken of her family to me.'

At that moment another patient was an-
nounced, and not caring to detain the doctor longer, I thanked him and withdrew.

So this lovely girl, whose beauty had bewitched me to the extent that one brief glimpse of her face had sufficed to give me a deep interest in all connected with her, was poor—in need of money. And I, a man, had more than I could use. Yet what could I do to help her?

My thoughts turned to Mdlle. Durand's maid, the old Breton woman who, the physician had said, almost worshipped her mistress. Was it possible that I might convince this woman of my friendly intentions? It seemed to me doubtful. She would probably look with suspicion on me, a young man and a stranger, and perhaps, while refusing to accept my advances, even warn Mdlle. Durand against me. Yet, the strange fascination which drew me on to interest myself in this girl made me feel that I must attempt something for her help. Most men, I daresay, would have left the affair severely alone—or seen in it but an opportunity to commence an acquaintance which might end in a pleasant liaison. I am different. I daresay I have, in spite of the active life which I have hitherto led, a
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considerable dash of romance in my nature. And all I have yet heard of Mdlle. Durand has not served to warn me from her path.

As I passed the concierge lodge on my way homewards—I hardly know what made me do it—I stopped and inquired of the old man if he could give me Doctor Denver's address.

'Alas, monsieur!' he said, shaking his head dejectedly, 'I cannot tell. The doctor did not leave his address with me. I cannot say where he lives now.'

I expected no less, and I continued my way upstairs.

It was on Wednesday night that Madeleine Durand returned terror-stricken and exhausted to her old servant's arms. It was now Saturday, and, as far as I knew, neither of my neighbours had since left their apartment. Mdlle. Durand was, of course, ill; but surely her servant must eventually emerge from her retreat. There must be provisions to be bought, marketing to be done that could not be intrusted to tradesmen's boys. So I spent this afternoon in my rooms, seated with my front door ajar in
order to hear if anyone left the opposite flat, and hasten in pursuit.

For a long while the besieged remained invisible, their portal obstinately closed, and I was on the point of deciding either that I must again play the spy upon them—a thing my sense of shame forbade me to attempt, great as was my inclination—or that I must resign my hopes, when at length I heard the sound of a latch being raised, and the old servant, after peering forth for a second in apparent doubt, hurried out, and descended the stairs.

Now was my opportunity. I followed and caught her as she reached the second landing. 'Madame Perpol, excuse me,' I said. 'May I have a word with you?'

The woman started violently, and turning gazed at me for a moment with affrighted eyes. Her scrutiny of my features after a moment, however, appeared to relieve her, and her ruddy face gradually recovered its natural hue. 'Well, monsieur?' she said coldly.

'Your mistress—Mdlle. Durand—is she better?' I asked.

Madame Perpol gave me a quick glance. 'Is monsieur a friend of mademoiselle's?'
she asked drily. 'I do not remember to have seen monsieur before.'

'No,' I returned boldly, 'I have not the honour of mademoiselle's acquaintance, but —but I happened to be talking with Doctor Louvet to-day, and . . .'

'Monsieur knows the good doctor?' began the old woman, warmly. 'Ah, yes, mademoiselle is better, thank Heaven! better. . . . But . . . ' she resumed quickly, fixing her eyes on me again with suspicion, 'Doctor Louvet could come himself to inquire after ma'mzelle; and you, monsieur, you say, do not know her?'

'It is true,' I replied sadly, 'I do not know her. I only wish I did, for then I might be of service to her.'

Madame Perpol, however, shrugging her shoulders, turned away coldly and prepared to pass on. I began to fear that this woman would be too much for me, and on the spur of the moment I took a few small notes from my pocket and put my hand on her arm.

'One moment,' I said firmly. 'You must believe me, I want to be a friend—a friend to both you and your mistress,' and I quietly held the notes out to her. The old woman looked at them, trembling, for a moment
before she forced her features to resume their former harsh expression.

'A friend,' I continued with emphasis, 'nothing more. I do not know Mdlle. Durand, it is true, but . . .'

Madame Perpol turned to me quickly, and, as if she had made up her mind. 'It is useless, monsieur! It cannot be,' she said, almost fiercely, and she attempted to push past me.

At the end of my resources I let a chance arrow fly. It was indeed a wild shot, but it had a far greater effect than I could have anticipated. Bending down to her I whispered in her ear, 'I was at home on Wednesday night, Madame Perpol; would it not be better to make a friend of me?'

At my words the old woman began to tremble violently. Indeed for a moment I thought she would throw herself on her knees to me. With an effort, however, she appeared to conquer her emotions, and gazing at me with terrified eyes, she murmured hoarsely, 'What do you want?'

'I want to be a friend—that is all,' I returned gently. 'I have reason to fear that
your young mistress is in some danger. Perhaps I have reasons, which even you are not cognisant of, for thinking so. I live here in the next flat to you. I entered it a week ago. I was at home on... on *Wednesday night.*

Madame Perpol with difficulty repressed a groan.

'Yes, *Wednesday,*' I repeated. 'Tell *Mdllle. Durand* what you please of our conversation—nothing if you like, all if you will. But remember, if you should need a friend at any time, I am at hand, will you, Madame Perpol?'

I pressed the notes into her hand, and this time, after looking keenly into my eyes, the old woman took them, and with a sigh murmured, 'Ah, monsieur! if only I could be sure! But ma'mzelle is lovely and alone... and...'

'I know,' I replied quickly. 'You are right to suspect everyone. I am glad to see that your young mistress is safe with you. Remember what I have told you.' And I turned back up the stairs.

Madame Perpol stood watching me for a moment irresolutely, and then, folding the notes up, she placed them in her dress, and,
with a wild glance towards heaven, she continued her way.

On returning to my chambers I determined to accomplish a small task which I had had for some time in my mind. It was to protect myself from the temptation of overlooking my neighbours, by sealing up the holes in the partition wall. With this object I had already cut a few small wooden pegs which I intended to use to drive into the plaster.

I knew I should not need to make much noise while hammering the pegs into their places, but I thought it prudent to take a last look through into the next room before I commenced my work, as, should there by any chance be someone present, my efforts would almost certainly attract attention. I am ashamed to relate that I did not regret this precaution, but on the contrary became firmly convinced of its necessity, when I saw that the apartment on the other side of the wall had an occupant.

For, seated in an armchair by the fire was Mdlle. Durand. She was clad, I noticed, in black—in some garment half tea half dressing-gown, and was looking still pale and weak. Her rounded chin
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rested lightly in her hand, while she gazed sadly into the depths of the glowing coals, and my heart beat as I fancied I saw a tear resting in the long dark lashes of her eyes.

For a moment I watched her while she sat there, motionless and beautiful, her whole attitude expressive of sorrowful meditation; then, as I was about to turn away she moved suddenly. A sob seemed to spring unrepressed from her bosom, and rising, she glided swiftly towards the crucifix beneath me, and under which she had knelt on that first evening.

Spell-bound and enthralled, I watched her as she crossed herself and sank to her knees. A strange emotion held me powerless. The crucifix was but a little below the level of my face, and as the young girl turned her dark, sad eyes upwards, they seemed almost to meet mine, invisible though I knew myself to be, and gazing into their glorious depths, for one wild moment I let myself go in the fancy that they were indeed turned on me—that this young girl, alone, unprotected, in trouble, did indeed implore my help—my pity. For one mad second I was about to speak, then with an effort I tore myself
away and flung myself, trembling with the struggle, into a chair.

Ah, yes! Unfortunate, under the shadow of some great disaster, in need, Madeleine Durand may be. On her honesty I would stake my existence. Though my cheek burns when I imagine her ever knowing it, I have seen her when she fancied herself alone, and I cannot henceforth doubt her.
CHAPTER V

DOCTOR DENVER

To-day has been eventful, for I have seen once again this mysterious doctor who formerly occupied my apartment, and, more than all, I have made the acquaintance of Mdle. Durand.

After lunch I was seated at one of the small marble-topped tables outside the Café Americain on the Boulevard des Italiens.

I had been there for some time, sipping my coffee and idly watching the gay crowd that thronged the pavement, when a man approached, and, taking a seat at a table on my left, called the waiter and ordered a brandy and soda. He took no notice of me, and evidently did not in the least recollect me; but in a second I had recalled his features to my memory. I was certain of it. He was not a man that, once seen, one could easily forget. The tall, thin
figure, the black moustache, showing darker against the dead white skin, the cold keen eyes, were those of Madeleine Durand’s former neighbour, unless I was much mistaken; and I turned my chair slightly so as to keep him in sight, yet without letting it appear that I watched him.

However, my observations, for a time, brought me little result. Doctor Denver, if it were he indeed, sat smoking his cigarette and drinking his brandy and soda, with his eyes fixed in deep abstraction on the pavement. He spoke to no one and was spoken to by none; and after the first careless glance at me, his neighbour, he did not again look in my direction. I had not even been able to determine by his accent during the brief conversation he had held with the waiter whether he was an Englishman, but if so, he had an exceptionally good accent in speaking French.

‘Well, Doctor Denver,’ I thought, as I watched him, ‘this has at least been a good opportunity to fix your features in my memory, if it leads to nothing else.’ And I found myself wondering vaguely whether he would start if I happened to mention out loud the name ‘Durand.’
I did not intend certainly to make the experiment; but I soon had a chance of testing the effect one name at least would have upon the worthy doctor, for I was saluted suddenly by a touch on the shoulder, and, wildly fancying for a moment that it had come from Denver himself, I swung round quickly to face a well-dressed young fellow of twenty-six or so, with a handsome face which smiled down on my surprise.

'Hello, Carlton, old fellow! what a pleasant rencontre! How are you, and what are you doing on this side of the line?'

It was Dick Lauford—the Honourable Richard Lauford to his tradespeople, whom he did not always pay as promptly as he might—Dick to everyone else. We had seen some knocking about together, Dick and I, on the other side of the world, and I had been of service to the young fellow once or twice. At any other time I should have been delighted to meet Lauford again, but I fear that on this occasion he had cause to think my greeting rather cool, for my glance had caught the sudden start my neighbour on the left had given when Dick
called me by my name; and I saw that the cold keen eyes were fixed excitedly on my face.

The man turned away sharply when he caught me looking at him, and flicked the ash from his cigarette with an assumption of carelessness; but I was not deceived. Doctor Denver knew my name and took an interest in me—why? Because he had done me the honour to look over my papers? or because I was now M'dlle. Durand’s neighbour? I wondered.

‘Well, Carlton, Paris does not seem to have agreed with you! You are a trifle dull,’ remarked Dick, seating himself by my side.

‘Have a drink. I suspect it is the coffee that has had this sad effect upon your spirits. Never drink coffee in France! Where are you living? At an hotel?’

I tried to pull myself together. ‘No, I am in chambers in the Rue Tronchet,’ I returned rather abstractedly.

This time Denver was not to be caught, and he gave no sign of having heard me. As for myself, I was wishing Lauford, good fellow as he was, back again in the Antipodes, and praying that Denver might not take it into his head to leave the café before I was free to
follow him. For I had determined to discover the address of this mysterious doctor who possessed a duplicate key to my apartment, and who used it too, and also, if possible, approach him on the subject of his visit to my rooms.

But even while I schemed, Denver, as if he had guessed my intentions, rose and stepped across the pavement to where a fiacre stood by the crossing; and, as I hesitated, Lauford's next words made me change my mind and sink back again into my seat.

'Queer-looking fellow that,' he said, nodding in the direction of the now fast-vanishing cab. 'It's a small world, isn't it?'

'Do you mean to say you know that man—that Doctor Denver?' I asked breathlessly.

'Know him in a sort of way, yes! I didn't know his name was Denver, though. I met him under rather strange circumstances not long ago, and I am not likely to forget his face, even if he were not such an uncommon-looking chap in himself. But it is quite a yarn.'

'Have another cognac and siphon, and tell me all about it,' I said quickly. 'I am interested in the man.'
Lauford laughed carelessly. 'Oh, there is not much in it after all. I saw that man last in India. I and a fellow called Wardour were making a tour. Wardour had come in for some money and we were doing India pretty thoroughly. It was at Madura that this happened; a place which, as I daresay you are aware, is not far from Trichinopoly, "where the cheroots come from." Wardour was great on seeing "lions," and on the occasion I mention we were visiting the great Pagoda, the Temple of Minakshi. An old Brahmin, or something of the sort, was tooling us round, but after a time Wardour fancied we might manage to see more by ourselves, so, contriving to give our old guide the slip, we made off and wandered round alone. Fortunately it was tiffin-time, or prayers, or something of the kind, and we did not meet many people.

'Well, by-and-by we came to an old stone building of considerable size. It was not much to look at from the outside, but Wardour declared that it must be a monastery, and would be interesting. So we made our way in. For half an hour or so we strolled about, seeing nothing of any consequence, and coming across, to our
surprise, few signs of habitation. But at length, opening a door rather suddenly, we flopped straight into a large hall full of the ugliest-looking fellows you ever saw in your life—priests by the look of 'em. They were all got up to the nines, for some special occasion apparently; but what struck us as particularly strange was the fact that among them was an Englishman, a good-looking fellow, smartly turned out, and seeming for all the world as if he had just come out of Bond Street.

'Well, we did not really have time to notice much more, for, as soon as these old fellows caught sight of us, there was a noise like a dozen hen-roosts being robbed at night, and the whole room made for us, incensed apparently at our intrusion. We were too startled for the moment even to run, and a dozen knives were flashing perilously near us, when suddenly this English fellow stepped forward, and with a few words which we could not catch stopped the row.

'He asked us what we were doing there, and Wardour explained, very humbly, that we had lost our way, and so on, and the fellow must have made up some yarn or other, for, thanks to him, we got out safely—a thing
we never expected to do. You may imagine we thanked the Englishman before we made off. However, he was not very polite. He took small notice of our gratitude, and was fairly curt with us. In fact, he gave us a broad hint to mind our own business in future.

'Of course we wondered considerably at the time what a man like that could be doing among such a crew, but it is unnecessary to say we did not go back to ask him; and I haven't thought much about the affair since. The sight of that man again recalled it to me.'

'Are you certain it is the same?' I asked musingly.

'Perfectly! I should know him again anywhere.'

'One would imagine that he would have recognised you too!'

'Oh, no! I don't think he took much notice of us. He just helped two fellow-countrymen out of a fix. By the state of excitement those old Johnnies were in at the time we arrived, there must have been some big affair on, and I suppose our friend was more interested in that than in us. But it is a small world, isn't it?'
I was silent, and soon after this I made some excuse and parted with Lauford, wandering off down the boulevards in the direction Denver's cab had gone. I did not feel I had gained much by stopping to hear Dick's story and losing my chance of following the doctor. For, after all, what had I learned of the man? This incident of Eastern travel had only added another touch of mystery to an already mysterious affair; and again and again I asked myself what connection could there be between this man—who appeared as much at home in a Hindoo monastery as in Paris—and Mdlle. Durand.

Imagining, after an hour or two spent in fruitlessly promenading the boulevards, that I was not likely to meet Denver again that night, I returned to my rooms.

But my adventures were not yet over. I had got my key ready and was about to open my door when it appeared to me that I heard a cry come from the direction of the next flat.

I turned quickly and saw that the opposite door to mine was standing open. Even while I hesitated the cry was repeated, and stepping forward eagerly, I pushed back the door and looked in.
A strange sight met my eyes. In a corner of the little room, into which I had already twice gazed surreptitiously, a struggle was going on. Mdlle. Durand, leaning against the wall, pale, but with determination in her dark eyes, was fighting wildly with the old Breton woman for the possession of a knife which the elder woman clung to desperately, while she gave vent to the cries which I had heard.

At the sound of my steps Madame Perpol commenced to redouble her efforts, while she gasped to me, 'Ah, monsieur! for the love of Heaven, help me! Ma'mzelle—my Ma'mzelle Madeleine—will kill herself!'

Even as I stepped forward, however, the young girl let the weapon fall helplessly from her hand, and sobbing violently, sank to the ground. 'Heaven forgive me!' she murmured, 'I was wicked—wicked!'

The Breton woman was weeping bitterly too, now that the struggle was over; and her young mistress remaining crouched up on the rug where she had thrown herself, for a moment I hardly knew what to do.

Madame Perpol was the first to break the silence. 'How did you come here, monsieur?' she said at last confusedly.
‘The door was open,’ I replied, ‘I thought I heard a cry, and came to see if I could be of any service.’

At the sound of my voice Mdlle. Durand looked up. For an instant she gazed about her wildly, as if bewildered. Then, her cheek reddening as she caught my sympathetic glance, she made an effort and rose to her feet.

‘Who is this gentleman, Marie?’ she asked haughtily.

I interrupted Madame Perpol as she was about to speak. ‘Did you tell Mdlle. Durand of our conversation yesterday?’ I said quickly.

The old woman turned to her mistress. ‘This is the gentleman who spoke to me on the stairs, ma’mzelle,’ she murmured timidly.

Mademoiselle gave me a swift glance, and then appeared to consider for a moment. ‘May I ask how you come to know my name, monsieur?’ she said at length coldly.

‘It has been mentioned to me both by the concierge and by Doctor Louvet . . .’

Mdlle. Durand made an impatient move-
Louvet understand I did not care for any . . . any interference in my affairs.

I reddened at her tone and was silent, hardly knowing indeed what to reply; and the young girl continued haughtily: 'How is it, monsieur, that you come to interest yourself in me? My maid tells me you only entered this house a short while ago. I have been outside my apartment'—for a second she hesitated perceptibly—'but little lately. Therefore, in all probability you can hardly even have seen me before to-day.' And she bent her beautiful eyes on me with a searching gaze.

I felt myself in an awkward position. To confess that I had seen her before, and that twice, would not, I felt, improve matters—more especially if I had to tell her how it had occurred.

'Mademoiselle,' I said, after a moment's hesitation, 'as I told your servant, I fancied that you were in trouble—forgive me—I had reasons, which I believe you cannot be aware of, to imagine danger . . .'

I saw the two women exchange a glance that had something of terror in it, and I continued hastily: 'I know it is extraordinary in an utter stranger . . . you may
misunderstand my motives, but you are English, I think? An English lady alone in a foreign land. Surely I may, as an Englishman, offer my services to a countrywoman.'

Mdlle. Durand bowed coldly. 'That is sufficient, sir,' she said, speaking now for the first time in English. 'It only remains for me to thank you for your courtesy—to a countrywoman as you say. If at any time I should require you services—which I confess does not appear to me likely—I will inform you.'

She turned away. I saw that I was about to be dismissed, and I felt that, this opportunity gone, I might never have another; but I had also seen, quickly as Mdlle. Durand had turned aside, that her lip was quivering, and that her haughty composure was only retained by a great effort. Indeed, poor girl, her courage must have been marvellous to support her so long.

The honesty of my intention to serve her gave me strength to strike a last blow.

'Forgive me again,' I said quickly, 'but let me ask you a question. Do you know the name "Denver"?'

To my amazement—for it appeared to
upset all my theories—Mdlle. Durand shook her head indifferently.

'But surely you must,' I said blankly. 'Doctor Denver! a tall dark man with black moustache and a very white face . . .'

I stopped suddenly, for as the words passed my lips Madame Perpol sprang towards her young mistress, who had given a cry and seemed about to faint. She recovered herself, however, with an effort, and turned to me with terror in her eyes. 'That man!' she gasped—'the man you have described!—where is he? Why have you mentioned him?'

'Where he is now I do not know,' I said. 'I should have known to-day but for an accident which caused me to lose sight of him. However, he may return here again, and then . . .'

'Return here again!'

I stared. 'Surely you are aware that the man I mention has been living in this house till just lately?' I said wonderingly. It is his apartment which I now occupy.'

'Living here! and we never saw him! never suspected! Ah, Marie! how helpless, how helpless we two women are!' And the young girl turned weeping to the elder.
DOCTOR DENVER

woman. 'Ah! why did you stop me just now?'

Distressed beyond measure at the emotion I had caused, I attempted to alleviate it. 'The man has gone,' I said gently, 'and probably will not return. If he does, I shall be here. He shall not harm you.'

The young girl turned her lovely tear-stained eyes to mine. 'Ah, you mean to be kind, I see, but you do not understand! I—I—am grateful, but go—ah! please go, Mr . . . '

'Mr Carlton,' I said. 'Yes, I will go. Forgive me for my stupid intrusion, but don't misunderstand it. Please remember that I live next door and that I am always at your service.'

I bowed and turned away, but as I passed the old servant I murmured in her ear, 'Remember! send for me,' and I made my way to my rooms, where I have been seated since.

I fear I cannot congratulate myself upon the success of this my first interview with my neighbour. True, I have seen her, spoken to her, and the effect her personality had already had upon me, nearer acquaint-
ance has not diminished. True, her eyes, in the end, seemed to rest almost kindly upon me. But to all appearances my visit has been anything but a cause of relief to her in her anxiety. My mention of this man Denver—whom, by the way, strangely enough, the two women do not know by name—seemed but to increase their agitation.

How queer that they should not be aware of this fellow's presence in the house. I can only suppose that he has been careful not to meet them on the stairs or elsewhere, and of course the fact that they did not know him by name must have assisted him. Still . . .

In spite of myself my thoughts fly back to the cause which led me to enter Mdlle. Durand's apartment. Good heavens! is it really possible that this girl, so young, so beautiful, so high-bred apparently, can have been driven to such extremities—to seek in death an escape from trouble? What deadly impasse confronts her then? What terrible secret can have thrown its dark shadow over her life?

The terror expressed by both women when my description of this man Denver warned
them he was near—his own stealthy visit to my rooms, the means he had taken to spy upon them—all seem to point to him as the directing spirit of this storm which approaches them, and to bind the three together in some strange and weird conjunction.

And I who would help her—this girl whose beauty and misfortunes have transported me—for I hardly recognise myself—from the usual practical everyday world into a land of mystery and romance—I am helpless. Will a girl like that ever confide in me, a stranger, such trouble as hers must be? Her woman seems too devoted for me to hope for much in that direction. There remains, therefore, but the third character in this mysterious drama—the man! Can I hope to come across him again? Yes—if I search Paris for him. The man whose mention can thus strike terror into the hearts of two women must be a scoundrel, I feel; and, by every law that binds a man to aid a woman, I am bound to help Madeleine Durand. The task may not prove simple. I may meet with the usual reward meted out to him who interferes in other people's affairs. This mad love of mine, which I
hardly dare think of yet, may pass away with nearer acquaintance, or my very efforts may shatter my idol. I care not. I know I have never so blessed my independence and my idleness which permit me to occupy my time in any way I will. For the future my energies are Madeleine Durand's. Let Doctor Denver beware!
CHAPTER VI

THE LINKS OF THE CHAIN DRAWN CLOSER

If Napoleon were indeed master of his fate, he was surely the only individual who ever attained to that happy state. For myself, no leaf caught up by furious tornado was ever more helpless than I in the power of the whirlwind which had swept me onwards since first I entered the house in the Rue Tronchet.

The day after my interview with Mdlle. Durand I set myself the task of finding this man Denver, whose connection with Mdlle. Durand I felt I must fathom before I could assist her. Before two days had passed, however, I began to feel certain that I myself was being shadowed. On two occasions I had cause to believe that my rooms had again been visited, and although the intruder, whoever he might be, must have been baulked to find that I had closed
the holes in the wall, still I was sure that my papers and letters had been again examined. It is true that on this occasion the act had been accomplished with due precaution, but none the less evident to my fancy, and the fact gave me a most unpleasant feeling of insecurity.

I could not, it was certain, remain for ever in my rooms; yet the moment I left them they were at the mercy of this man who held the duplicate key. What could I do? To complain to the police would be to court enquiry, or to attract the attention of the official mind to my neighbours; and this risk, for Mdille. Durand's sake—firmly as I believed in her—I could not make up my mind to take. Unfortunately, too, my concierge was of little service to me in the dilemma, being old and deaf; and his wife who did my rooms was employed outside for the remainder of the day. Unfortunately it was perfectly simple for anyone to enter the main building unnoticed, if they wished to do so. Although the great door of a French house is invariably closed at dusk, it opens, on a summons from the bell, by means of a string which runs to it from the porter's lodge. In nine cases out of ten
a visitor who enters boldly and walks upstairs will escape interrogation; for it is rarely that the concierge emerges from his snug box to scrutinise a person who, he is well aware, will turn out to be, in all probability, but one of the hundred odd occupants of the house.

Thus I began to sigh for the security of the British front door and latch-key, and still more to search Paris wildly for this worthy doctor who took such an interest in me. And Fate, after ill-treating me for a time, at length put the opportunity I sought into my hands.

To recall what I did with the chance when it came to me makes my cheek redden even as I write these lines.

I was coming slowly down the Avenue de l'Opera one evening—I had been dining with Lauford at the Continental—when, as I passed Maxim's, a man in evening clothes emerged from the doorway, and, stopping for a second to light a cigarette, strolled on in the direction of the Place de l'Opera.

I hesitated momentarily, and then, as he moved forward with his eyes fixed on the ground, I followed.

It was Doctor Denver at last. In my
moment of indecision, while Denver lighted his cigarette, I had seen two courses open to me. I might stop the man at once and have my explanation with him—but this for several reasons, not the least of which was a distaste for a public squabble, seemed inadvisable—or I might follow him, and by tracking him home make sure of his address and my interview at the same time.

The latter suggestion prevailed, and although I had little experience of this kind of work, Denver walked so slowly, and his tall figure was so conspicuous in the crowd of smaller Frenchmen, that I had no fear of losing sight of him.

After leaving the Avenue de l'Opera, Denver turned to the right along the Boulevard des Italiens, and in the throng of flâneurs that haunt the streets from the 'absinthe hour' to midnight I had to draw in closer to him. For a time, indeed as long as he kept to the main boulevards, I feared that he might be merely taking an after-dinner stroll, and that at any moment he might turn back and meet me face to face; but as time passed on, and we commenced to reach the end of the fashionable quarter, I began to fancy that the doctor was
in reality going home, and to wonder where that home might be.

The puzzle did but grow greater as Denver, looking neither to the right nor left of him, with his hands in the pocket of his overcoat, and his gaze bent, as if in deep abstraction, on the pavement, continued his slow but steady progress. On and on we went, till at last, the Place de la Bastille being reached, we left the long miles of the Grands Boulevards behind us altogether, and turning to the right, emerged on to one of the quays of the Seine, and continued our course along the dark and sluggish river.

Another mile and I put aside all conjecture and followed grimly step for step.

The evening was a December one—cold and foggy. As night fell a thin drizzle of rain came on, and the streets became wet and greasy. The man in front turned up the collar of his overcoat and still strode forward. I followed his example, but less carelessly. Truth to tell, I was arriving gradually at the condition of a boxer whom a superior antagonist wears down by a long and patient defence. It was all very well for Denver—he knew his own plans, and
what he was about. A vague suspicion had begun to worry me.

As we passed out of the region of gay shops and busy throngs traffic grew less and passers-by rarer. The quays along which we still made our way were badly lighted and almost deserted—only here and there a belated cab telling us that we were still within hail of civilisation. I felt that Denver could not live in this quarter, so far from the centre of Paris; nor did it seem within the bounds of reason that he should choose such a night for a pleasure stroll. Was it then possible that he had seen me and was merely playing with me? If so, he must have been endowed with almost superhuman quickness, for I had never noticed him give even a glance behind—still . . .

One of the objections I had had to approaching my quarry had by this time disappeared, it is true, for there was now no one about to notice our altercation. Yet still I did not dare to put an end to my suspense by quickening my stride and accosting him. Who could say what another few minutes, another hundred yards even, might not discover?—and I plodded on.
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For some time, in the confusion of my mind, I had taken little notice of the way we went; and, indeed, well as I knew Paris, I had got completely out of my reckoning. But after a while I fancied that Denver appeared to be doubling slightly on his track. We had certainly left the Seine, my only land-mark, considerably to our right, and in one case we had indubitably retraced our footsteps.

I was considering this new development thoughtfully, when Denver, turning suddenly to his left, about two hundred yards in front of me, disappeared.

I hurried on, rounded the corner, and gave an exclamation of dismay. There was no one in sight.

Suddenly, in the middle of the road, shining up white against the mud, I caught sight of some object which made me quicken my steps eagerly. It was an envelope! A hasty glance under the uncertain light assured me that it was addressed to Denver. Here, then, was more than I could have even hoped for. Doctor Denver had made free with my papers. Now I could return the compliment. I lifted it eagerly from the road. Alas! even as I did so, from behind
me came the sound of footsteps; and out of a doorway, not fifteen yards away, emerged the tall and unmistakable figure of the man I had pursued. Taken utterly by surprise, and hardly thinking what I did, I crammed the letter into my pocket and walked on swiftly. Denver followed, and the chase had begun again.

But this time the positions were reversed and I was the pursued.

For a quarter of a mile I walked on blindly, hardly noticing what direction I took. I was wondering what on earth I could do to shake Denver off. Like a flash I had realised the fatal error of which I had been guilty. All idea of accosting this man, and accusing him of making free with my papers, had vanished, now that I had his letter in my pocket and he had seen me place it there, startled by his re-appearance. For want of sufficient proof on my side he might deny my accusation. I could not very well deny his.

There was another thing. This letter, if I could only give him the slip and contrive to read it, might tell me far more than I could hope to arrive at by any conversation with him.
LINKS OF THE CHAIN DRAWN CLOSER  65

However, after a while I began to conceive a certain amount of respect for this man whose detective abilities were infinitely superior, as I soon had to confess, to my own. Try as I might, I could not shake him off, and I was compelled, at last, to decide that his intention was to force me to turn to bay; for I saw with dismay that he was gradually closing in on me, and he must know, from the deserted condition of the streets, that I could not help being aware of his pursuit.

I looked wildly round me for some sign of escape. The road we were in was straight, narrow and empty. We seemed to be the only pedestrians in the city. A corner came into view, and I dodged down it, and round a second as quickly as I could without absolutely running. A glance behind me showed me that I had not gained a yard.

I had almost made up my mind to turn and face my pursuer, when from the distance came suddenly a sound of wheels approaching us. A belated fiacre appeared in sight, making its way back to the city. Ah! if it should only chance to be empty!

Then a second cab came into sight,
following the first. I looked at them eagerly. They were both unoccupied, and as they drew near the two drivers commenced a conversation from the boxes of their vehicles. An idea came to me, gathered from some half-forgotten detective tale read years before.

I stepped quickly out into the road and stopped the first fiacre. 'To the Madeleine!' I said out loud. Then, handing the driver a ten-franc piece, I whispered, 'Drive on as soon as you hear the door bang,' and I got into the vehicle, closing the door behind me.

As the driver whipped up his horse I sprang quickly out of the opposite side, leaving the cab to drive on. I was about to fling myself down to escape observation under cover of the second fiacre's progress, when I felt a tap on my shoulder, and turning, with my cheek on fire with shame at my failure, I found myself face to face with Denver.

For a moment, while I hardly knew whether to swear or to laugh, we faced one another.

Denver stood with his hands in his pockets in an easy attitude, watching me,
and I could not help envying him his coolness. A slightly contemptuous smile was on his white face, and his eyes had a cold gleam in their depths. Accustomed as I was to the society of rough and reckless men—men holding their lives cheap, and, like Eugene Aram, 'equal to either fortune'—I could not but feel that I was in the presence now of a man in whom reckless courage, combined with cool deliberation, were carried to their furthest extreme. For the rest, I realised that he was of powerful physique and a strikingly handsome man.

Ashamed of my weak position, I recovered my wits with an effort and drew myself up. 'What are you following me for?' I asked sternly.

Doctor Denver eyed me for a moment cynically. 'I might reply, 'What are you following me for?'' he retorted sarcastically. 'For it appears to me that that has been the occupation of your evening. What do you mean by it?'

His coolness irritated me. 'You entered my rooms the other evening,' I said, 'by means of a key of which you had no right to retain possession. I have reason to think that my papers were examined . . . .'
Doctor Denver laughed coldly. 'Rather difficult to prove that against me, eh?'

The sneering look on his face enraged me. 'That does not much matter, perhaps, in itself,' I returned hotly. 'What does matter is this—the cupboard door was left open. I suppose you forgot to shut it. You understand what I mean. What object you have to spy upon Mdlle. Durand I do not know, but I warn you to forbear in future from making use of my rooms for the purpose.'

Denver hesitated for a second and bit his lip. 'You appear to be interested in the young lady,' he said quietly.

'I am,' I returned—'sufficiently to take care that you do not annoy her.'

"Annoy" is a peculiar word to use under the circumstances,' said Denver, with his eyes turned thoughtfully to the ground. 'Under the circumstances,' he repeated softly.

His tone was peculiar, and I stared at him. 'What have you to do with Mdlle. Durand?' I said angrily.

Denver was silent for a moment, while he traced figures in the mud with the toe of his patent leather boot. At last he looked up and met my eye full. 'Nothing much,' he said easily, 'only—only I am her husband.'
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I gasped. 'Her husband!'

'Her husband,' repeated Denver, watching me curiously. 'Is there anything extraordinary in that?'

'It's a lie!' I cried angrily, trying vainly to collect my thoughts. 'Why, she—she did not even know your name!'

Denver looked up quickly. 'Didn't she?' he said. 'Didn't she?'

I could not help seeing that my words had told him something that he wished to know, for the expression of his face changed and his interest seemed increased.

'So you have spoken to her of me?' he said softly.

But I was on my guard now. 'I merely asked Mademoiselle Durand,' I returned with emphasis, 'if she was acquainted with you, and she denied it...'. I stopped suddenly, and a pang ran through my heart, for I had remembered the effect my description of this man had had upon my neighbours.

But Denver did not appear to notice my pause. He pondered for a while, and then, as if making up his mind, faced me again: 'Thank you!' he said; 'and now let me give you a piece of advice. Keep away from my wife for the future.'
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

'It's a lie,' I cried, 'she's not your wife. She would have known you were there—she—'

'Oh, circumstances made it better for us to live apart. I daresay you understand. The usual thing, you know! But that is enough. I have warned you!' And turning away, he walked on, leaving me standing dazed and confused in the middle of the road.

Madeleine Durand married! That man's wife! Oh, it was impossible! I would not believe it. . . . Yet how it explained the whole affair! What light it let into incidents till now so mysterious! Denver's propinquity—his pursuit of her—her terror when I described him—his interest in me—all were explained by those sordid facts: a matrimonial squabble and a guilty wife. . . . But no! a hundred times no! I would not believe it of Madeleine Durand. The man was lying for purposes of his own, and, believing me simple, had gullied me.

Suddenly I remembered the letter that I had picked up, and approaching a lamp-post, I took it from my pocket and opened it. The envelope contained merely a blank sheet of paper, and was addressed to Denver at my own rooms, his old address. Then I under-
stood! He had laid a trap for me, with the intention of forcing this conversation on me, and I had fallen blindly into it. And what had I learned with all my trouble? Nothing of this man—not even where he lived.

Of Madeleine Durand, however, I had learned much, if it were true!

‘True!’ The pain at my heart told me how deep the blow had gone; and I wandered on, taking no heed of the direction in which I went.

By-and-by the road became rougher, and I seemed to see the dark shadows of trees ahead, while my feet sank into deep mud. Then a high wall, facing me, brought me up suddenly. I was at the end of a cul-de-sac. I sprang up and raised myself to the top of the wall. All around me was darkness, save where, in front, far away, the lights of Paris shone. What place was this? and what could be the meaning of this wall? Some private park enclosure, perhaps, I thought. At any rate through it lay the way home. I dropped cautiously to the ground on the other side and stumbled forward.

Presently my feet encountered a brusque elevation in the soil, and I tripped and fell, my head striking against cold stone. I rose
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

a little dazed. Around me in the darkness vague, white shapes lifted themselves. Heavens! I knew now where I was, and a strange thrill ran through me. It was a graveyard—Montrouje, of course! What fate had led my steps here, and on this evening of all others?

For a moment I stood motionless, twisting round and round in my fingers some object that my hand had lighted on as I had fallen forward clutching at the long grass.

It was a little ring, the cold metal of which seemed to bite into my hand.
CHAPTER VII

THE RING

With trembling fingers and a heart that beat dully, for it seemed to me that I already knew what was to meet my eyes, I struck a match and looked at the object I had so strangely recovered.

It was a small gold ring without a stone—a ring that would barely slip on my little finger. On the inside were the initials 'M.D.' I laughed harshly. 'Madeleine Durand,' or 'Madeleine Denver,' or Madeleine—some other alias? Yes, I had seemed to know it from the first. That chain, which had sometimes appeared a chain of queer coincidences merely, had now become a chain of facts. Then had Denver's trap led intentionally to this dénouement too? Impossible, at least so far as the ring was concerned—but as regards the place? Or had my wandering footsteps brought me
to Montrouje by chance? How had the ring come there? Dropped by Madeleine Durand in her haste when she had fled, disturbed by the guardian's arrival, on that night when I had seen her first?

My mind, still dazed slightly by my fall, exhausted itself in vague, wild and even horrible speculations—sometimes rejecting the evidence of my senses, sometimes recalled to stern facts by the touch of the ring I held in my hand and the memory of the occasion when I had watched her return exhausted and trembling to her home.

After a time, however, the cold night air revived me, and I recovered the balance of my senses. I was in Paris, and this the nineteenth century. Some strange mystery all this must cover; but it must be some secret to be explained by nineteenth century facts, and not by superstition or mediæval legend. Yet what could the explanation be?

The rain struck on my face, and pulling myself together with an effort, I turned to where the glow of Paris lay before me in the distance, and struck out for home.

How I found my way at last I hardly
knew. There were times when I reasoned the road out sensibly by the aid of landmarks that I knew well—there were moments when I questioned passers-by as to the direction, and followed the instructions given me blindly, with feet that bore me on, as if by instinct, while my mind strayed far away.

I reached my house at last, and made my way upstairs, with a feeling of relief that I was home.

At Mdlle. Durand’s door I paused in doubt. Should I return the ring now, or on the morrow? But I felt I could not wait. I longed to hear how she would accept it—to watch her face as I told her where I had made my discovery—to hear what she could say in explanation. Above all was the desire to know if there had been truth in Denver’s cold tones when he had called himself her husband. I felt how much depended for me upon this interview: that it might be the death-blow to hopes whose strength I had perhaps hardly yet realised—yet I felt also that it was better far to know the worst at once; and with a beating heart I tapped at the opposite door.

At first no answer came, nor did I hear
any sound from within, but after a moment I fancied I heard a light footstep approach, and tapping again, the door opened and Mdlle. Durand stood before me.

The sight of her, after all that had passed through my brain in the last few hours, confused me utterly for a space, and the involuntary start she gave at my disordered appearance completed my embarrassment, causing me for the first time to notice that my evening clothes were soaked with rain, and stained with mud where I had fallen in the graveyard; while I could only imagine that my features must exhibit considerable traces of the mental crisis I had passed through.

Hardly knowing what I was about, I drew the ring from my pocket and held it out to her. As she caught sight of it she gave a little cry and, turning white, leaned back against the wall with frightened eyes fixed in mute inquiry on mine.

I stepped forward quickly as though to help her, but she held out her hand, keeping me off.

'May I speak to you?' I said.

For a moment she struggled to speak, and opened her lips as if to address me,
but they must have been dry and parched, for no sound came from them, and with a gesture towards the little salon, and a dumb inclination of her head, she answered my words.

I followed her into the room with a sudden impulse coming over me to fly. I felt like a schoolboy caught in some crime. What had I come for? Was this the girl I was going to accuse? And what was I about to accuse her of? Yet there was the ring in my hand.

Reaching the salon, she motioned me to a chair, but seeing that she still remained standing, I declined with a word, and we stood for a moment facing one another; I twisting the ring uncertainly in my fingers, she watching me, her figure erect and strained, while her eyes, with terror in their depths, seemed still to question.

Her evident fear of me commenced to make me feel a brute, yet, try as I would to collect my thoughts, I could not think of any way to commence. At length I began nervously, 'This is your ring, Mdlle. Durand?'

'Yes, it is mine.'

'I found it under strange circumstances this evening—circumstances which account
for the condition I am in—you must excuse me for presenting myself in this plight. I am afraid I am fearfully wet and muddy,' I continued rather weakly.

The moment I had spoken I saw by Mdlle. Durand's face that I had recalled by my unlucky words her own plight when she too had returned one night from Montrouje; and to spare her, I resumed quickly,—

'Perhaps I had better—rather than you should misunderstand me—explain how I came to find this ring. You will remember I spoke to you of a man, a Doctor Denver, who at one time occupied the rooms where I live now. I... I had reasons... to wish to see more of this man, and—forgive me!—I also thought he did not mean you well.'

Mdlle. Durand's eyes were fixed intently on mine, but there was no sign of anger in them, and I continued hurriedly, 'I saw him to-night, this Doctor Denver, and followed him, hoping to discover where he lived. He intentionally, as I now suppose, led me a long way. He must have discovered that I was following him, and he—he was too clever for me. However, we had an explanation at last. I regret now
THE RING

that I should have interfered in a matter which could be no concern of mine, seeing that he tells me he is your...’ I stopped suddenly, for almost involuntarily I had glanced at Mdlle. Durand’s hands hanging white and unadorned at her sides. There was no wedding ring there.

Her eyes flashed. ‘That man—he spoke of me? What did he say?’ excitedly. Then with an effort, coldly, ‘How did my name come to be introduced between two gentlemen whose acquaintance I have not the honour of?’

I stared. ‘Whose acquaintance you have not the honour of?’ I repeated.

‘Certainly. Unless the fact that you have twice spoken to me makes you an acquaintance. As for this—this Doctor Denver, I have never to my knowledge even seen him.’

I hardly knew what to say next; but the coldness of her tone made me reckless.

‘You are married?’ I asked rather wildly.

To my joy Mdlle. Durand stared at me as if I had suddenly taken leave of my senses. ‘Certainly not!’ she replied, with an air of surprise.

I gave an exclamation that was, I fear,
strangely joyful, coming from a gentleman who was not even an acquaintance. 'Then I knew it,' I cried, 'the man is a scoundrel. He was lying, as I thought, when he gave as an excuse for his spying upon you the fact that he was—forgive me—your—your husband!'

'My husband! Spying upon me? What do you mean?'

I stepped across to where the crucifix hung on the wall and pointed upward. The holes in the partition must have been cleverly contrived, for there was no sign of them from this side, save where, in one spot, I noticed that I had driven a peg through the plaster. 'That wall is pierced,' I said, 'from the other side. You were watched, for what reason I know not, if this man is unknown to you. I might have had no right to tax him with the fact, but that he has been back since the rooms were mine. He has kept the key of my apartment, and has been there in my absence. I am sure of it. He can have no personal interest in me, for I have but lately come from the Colonies, where I have lived for several years, and I have never met the man before.'

Mdlle. Durand seemed overwhelmed.
'No, no! It is me he watched,' she murmured, half to herself. 'What can I do, ah! what can I do?'

Her agitation emboldened me. 'Let me help you,' I cried eagerly. 'Tell me what this all means, if, indeed, as seems the case, you have no father, no brother to protect you. Some trouble, some danger overhangs you, you cannot fight it out alone. If not in me, at least confide in Doctor Louvet, who would be a friend to you, and leave it to me to convince him of my honesty.'

The earnestness of my tone caused Mdlle. Durand to look up, and her eyes met mine for a moment. Then she lowered them again, with a tinge of colour coming into her cheek, but she only sighed hopelessly. 'It is impossible!' she said sadly, 'I am alone. I must continue alone!'

'But the danger!' I gasped. 'This man is a scoundrel, and he must mean you harm, besides . . .' I stopped for a moment in thought. 'I have not yet told you how I found this ring,' I continued. 'Whether the man led me in that direction I know not, but after I left him I was lost for the moment. I wandered on until at last I came to a high wall at the end of a cul-de-sac. Climbing it,
I found myself in a graveyard—the graveyard of Montrouge . . .'

I stopped hastily, for Mdlle. Durand, with a little cry, fell fainting to the ground.

Shocked and greatly distressed, I called aloud for the servant, whom I had imagined to be in the apartment, and receiving no answer I ran wildly through the flat. But I found no one. The young girl must have been alone when I came. I had had small experience of fainting-fits, and was perhaps more terrified than I need have been at the consequence of my clumsy speech. But seeing her there so pale and motionless, her dark eyes closed, her exquisite lips white as in death, I lost my head. Flinging myself on my knees beside her I implored her to forgive me—to come back, and meeting no response covered her cold hands with kisses, only to redden with shame when at last her eyes opened and fixed themselves on me with a look half-shy, half-fierce.

'Forgive me! Oh, forgive me!' I murmured.

She sprang to her feet and put half the width of the room between us. 'Go!' she cried, trembling.

But I still felt her soft hands on my lips.
'Forgive me,' I cried again, 'I was a brute! But don't send me away again—this time, perhaps, for ever. Give me the right to help you—as a friend—as a brother if you will. Give it me, or . . . I will put an end to the affair by shooting this man who troubles you as I would shoot a dog, when next we meet.'

My rather extravagant threat caused a slight smile to flicker for a second on her lips, and I saw that she wavered.

An inspiration came to me. I turned to the portrait of the officer that hung above the mantelpiece. 'Is that your father?' I said quickly.

She bent her head in reply. 'Mine, too, served in that regiment,' I said. 'You must have heard of him. He was Colonel—Colonel Carlton. If you have, you will have also heard that he died rather than betray a trust. I swear by the honour I have for his memory that you may rely upon me, his son.'

Mdlle. Durand paused for a moment as if in doubt, and then, apparently deciding swiftly, moved across to the little desk standing by the window. 'I will trust you,' she said simply. 'I am helpless, alone. Ah! have I not failed already? And the thought
that this man is so near terrifies me. I may be weak—foolish,' she continued, meeting my eyes with a frank clear gaze that seemed to strive to pierce my thoughts, 'but I trust you, Mr Carlton.'

So saying, she took a packet from the desk, and murmuring, 'Now go, please, I am very tired,' she handed it to me and turned quickly away.

With an effort I kept back the words that rose to my lips, and restraining myself to one heartfelt 'Thank you!' I left her, with the parcel in my hand.
CHAPTER VIII

MDLLE. DURAND DISAPPEARS

Entering my rooms I flung myself into a chair, after placing the packet, apparently a collection of letters, carefully in my desk. Excited beyond measure with the events of the evening, I felt myself unable to collect my thoughts sufficiently to settle down to master its contents. My heart was still beating wildly, my lips still thrilling with the touch of her hand. She had accepted my help, was giving me her confidence; then she trusted me.

Again and again I recalled the scenes through which I had just passed; my meeting with Denver, the long chase, the terrible minutes in the graveyard when my brain had lost itself in wild conjectures. Once, even, I half rose to take up the packet and learn, what I felt it must tell me, the truth concerning all I doubted. But I sank back again
in my chair, I could not do it. To-morrow, yes. But this night I felt I could not run the risk. I was too happy as I was. It was not that I doubted her—Madeleine—but that a fear possessed me that what I would read might dash my hopes, that some obstacle might stand revealed, some barrier raise itself insurmountable between us, where now for the moment I saw all clear and smiling. How beautiful she was! That touch of hauteur was but an added charm, and she had half melted more than once. She a wife? Denver’s wife? Impossible! And I felt a thrill of joy as I realised the fact that I was living in the same house with her, that I should see her often, daily.

The hours passed as I dreamed, wild dreams of a bright future, with her for my companion, till at last the cold light of the winter’s morning breaking through my lattice shutters warned me that I had had no rest; and turning to my bedroom, I sank into my bed, tired out.

When I awoke, to my surprise I found it already long past midday; and astonished that Madame Lefort, the wife of my concierge, had not tapped at my door to awaken me, I rose and dressed myself preparatory to
setting out for my breakfast—a French meal of coffee and a brioche—which I was accustomed to take at a café below in the street.

I was putting my gloves on when I heard a noise of footsteps on the landing outside, and then, as I fancied, a loud knock at the door.

I opened it and looked out. A man was engaged in moving furniture from the opposite flat into the passage, and Madame Lefort, a duster in her hand, and her face red with exertion, appeared to be superintending him.

I stared in surprise. ‘Did you knock, Madame Lefort?’ I asked.

‘Ah, monsieur, no! It was but Monsieur Constant. I hope he has not disturbed monsieur. It was in moving the chair that he struck against the door. But monsieur must excuse me that I have not yet been to clean his rooms. We have been so busy to-day, what with mademoiselle leaving and all . . .’

I started forward. ‘Mademoiselle leaving? Do you mean Mdlle Durand?’

‘Yes, monsieur! Did not monsieur hear? Yes! Ah! the poor young lady! but
what would you? You see she was too proud, and when the *propriétaire* said . . .'

I stopped her, and with a gesture beckoned her inside, with my heart sinking. 'Tell me all about it, Madame Lefort,' I said, as calmly as I could. 'I know nothing as yet.'

Never unwilling to gossip, and delighted to find my interest for once aroused, Madame Lefort unfolded her tale.

It appeared that for some time previous to my meeting with her, Mdlle. Durand and her servant had been in great straits for money. Proud and reserved as the young girl had been, and jealously as her Breton servant guarded her mistress's affairs, their poverty had, nevertheless, been a common secret. How, indeed, could it be otherwise, living as they did in one of these great French houses where, as Madame Lefort put it, there are always over a score of idle servants who have nothing better to do than watch their neighbours, and where every parcel that comes into the house is noticed, and every tradesman's boy questioned? How the two women had contrived to live at all was a puzzle, Madame Lefort continued, seeing that Mdlle. Durand, who had at first given music and singing lessons, had of late
lost all her pupils. (I thought with a blush of the few notes Madame Perpol had clutched so eagerly that morning when I had met her on the steps, and I wildly wished that I had given her more.) But they struggled on, perhaps expecting money from some friend, until one day when the rent, always till that time punctually paid, became overdue.

All might yet have been well, however, for the propriétaire's agent was an amiable man and quite prepared to trust ma'mzelle, but that, meeting Madame Perpol on the stairs on the previous day, he had chanced to mention the matter of the rent to her, and taking offence at what she thought his unnecessary anxiety, seeing that the money was but little overdue, she had turned on him angrily. The result had been an official intimation that the arrears must be forthcoming at once.

The woman must have told Mdlle. Durand of this, for the money, only a small amount, was forthcoming, and mademoiselle, haughtily refusing to remain any longer in the house, the two women had packed up their wearing apparel and a few small personal belongings and left that very morning. A furniture dealer of the neighbourhood had
appeared shortly afterwards and claimed the rest of their affaires as being hired from him. All money due for their hire had been paid him, he declared, and he was prepared to take charge of the goods again at once.

In answer to my eager inquiries, Madame Lefort knew nothing of Mdlle. Durand and her servant's destination. 'Poor mademoiselle, so young, and so beautiful! Her heart bled for her. Paris was so vast and so cruel to one in her position! But she hoped that all might yet be well with her.'

Overcome by the suddenness of this news, I remained for a moment too confused to think lucidly.

'Mdlle. Durand left no word for me—no letter?' I asked at length.

Madame Lefort's face brightened. 'But yes, of course, monsieur!' she said quickly. 'Madame Perpol did give me a little note for monsieur. How stupid of me to forget it! It is on the table in my husband's lodge. I will go for it.'

Thank heaven! then she had not gone away without thinking of me after all! She had left me word where to find her! How could I doubt that she would, after last night?
MDLLE. DURAND DISAPPEARS

I waited breathless while Madame Lefort toiled down the long stairs; and then, unable to restrain my impatience to see the letter, I flew after her.

When I reached the little office at the end of the front hall I could hear the old woman groping about on the table for the note. The little lodge was dark, being lighted only by a small window on the back court, and it was a moment or two before I could take in my surroundings. When at last I caught sight of Madame Lefort's face I saw that she wore a look of distress as she fumbled with her glasses, and pushed the papers and other articles on the table aside.

'Can I help you to find the letter?' I said.

Madame Lefort looked up confusedly into my face. 'Ah, monsieur! it is very strange! I put the billet there, I am sure of it!'

'Don't say it has gone!' I cried in dismay.

'But, monsieur!' stammered the old woman. 'But—but—I cannot find it. It is gone!'

I hastened to the table and began to search wildly. It was useless; no letter to
me was to be seen, and I turned to
madame.

'Are you sure you placed the note here?' I said sternly. 'Think again! It is most
important to me that it should not be lost.'

Madame Lefort sighed, and sank help-
lessly into a chair. 'Quite sure, monsieur,
quite, quite sure! I placed it there on the
table, and I noticed it again not half an hour
ago—just before the doctor came.'

'Doctor!' I cried. 'What doctor?'

'Doctor Denver, monsieur. The gentle-
man who used to . . .'

'He was here? in this room to-day? Doctor Denver?'

'Yes, monsieur,' said the old woman,
looking up surprised at my excitement.
'He came to see if by chance there were
any letters for him. He said . . . but
surely monsieur does not think that by any
accident the doctor has taken his note?'

I turned away, afraid lest my temper
should get the better of me. That scoundrel!
Was it possible that he had served me this
trick? What cruel luck that he should have
returned that very morning—that I should
over-sleep myself and so leave the letter
waiting at his mercy. I vowed that when
next we met I would take a reckoning for this, if for nothing else. But was it indeed the doctor who had taken the note? Vainly we commenced another search, madame and I, turning over the papers, looking under the table, in the book-shelves—everywhere where a letter might have dropped, even sending out for madame's husband at his déjeuner across the way. It was all to no avail. The letter was gone, and I at least could have no doubt as to the manner in which it had been spirited away.

I returned to my apartment too disconsolate even to remember my breakfast. She, Madeleine Durand, had gone, and I knew not where to look for her!

At first I hardly realised what an ill turn Denver had played me. It seemed to me at the time merely a temporary misfortune—the loss of a letter which would have been something of hers to cherish, to dwell upon; a day or two's anxiety as to her whereabouts and some difficulty in discovering them—but as time went on and I heard no word of her I began to realise all that the loss of this letter might mean to me. I commenced to feel at last how improbable it was that a girl like Mdlle. Durand would stoop to
write a second time to a man who was almost a stranger to her and who had left her first note unanswered. For she could hardly imagine that it had never been received by me. Probably, too, it had been with some inward struggle that she had addressed me at all. And now she would think me at the very least discourteous. She would imagine that all my assurances, my wishes to befriend her, had been but feigned.

As these thoughts grew upon me, the fancy that she might misunderstand my silence, that she might, nay, must, need my help and advice, set me madly to work to find her. I inserted advertisements in the papers explaining the loss of her letter. I hunted Paris wildly for some trace of her; and even enlisted in my services the aid of one of those private inquiry agents of whom Paris boasts so many. But for the time, at least, it was of no avail. Madeleine Durand had disappeared without leaving a trace behind her, and Paris became for me a howling wilderness where I wandered careless and without interest.

It was only in turning over my desk one day—a thing I seldom did—that my eye was
caught at last by the little packet which Mdlle. Durand had handed to me on the night when I had implored her so fervently for her confidence. And with a start of recollection I grasped it, amazed that I could have for so long forgotten its existence. The truth was, I suppose, that since that night when I had first hesitated to open the packet, my mind had been too much occupied with my longing to meet Mdlle. Durand again, with my search for her, and the thoughts of a love which now seemed so hopeless, for me to go back to my old doubts and speculations concerning her, and so be reminded of the existence of the packet.

But now I took a seat at my desk with a wild hope that at last I might learn something that would give me a clue to her present circumstances, some solution of the mystery that overhung her; and with a beating heart I tore off the layer of papers which enclosed, I imagined, a collection of letters or memoranda.

To my surprise, however, I saw that the enclosure consisted of one lengthy MSS., written in a fine hand on a pile of thin foreign note-paper, and that it was inscribed
in a female hand on the outside, 'Lancelot's letter.'

This handwriting, I felt instinctively, was Madeleine's, and I glanced at it with a sigh. A letter had been addressed to me in that sweet hand and I had lost it. Should I ever see her again? But 'Lancelot's letter'! Who was Lancelot? I took up the first page and looked at it with anxiety. Fortunately the commencing lines reassured me as to the writer's position regarding Madeleine Durand; but I had soon forgotten my momentary jealousy as I proceeded further, and by-and-by found myself poring over it with an interest that did not fade until I had completed the last sheet, and seated myself in my arm-chair, heedless of the flying hours, to ponder over it.

For here at last was the solution of the mysteries which had so exercised my brain since my first entrance to this house—here the explanation of Madeleine's conduct—of Denver's presence on the scene.
CHAPTER IX

THE GOLDEN LOTUS

This is the letter which Madeleine Durand had intrusted to me. I give it here in full. It was dated from Colombo some months before:—

'My Dear Madeleine,—It will no doubt surprise you to hear at such length from one whom you have not seen for so many years; not, I think, since the writer was at the happy age of twenty, and you were a little dark-eyed maid of ten. You were fond of Lancelot in those days, Madeleine! Yes, it is your poor old brother Lance who writes this! After all, I am your brother; for we had the same father, and your poor mother always liked me, and nursed me when I was ill. What an unlucky brute I have always been! My father did not really love me, Madeleine! My mother died, and then my wretched
health! *You* were the fortunate one. Father worshipped you. You were always well and strong, and *your* mother lived. Oh, God! Madeleine! if you shouldn't help me, what shall I do? I'm in awful trouble, terrible trouble, old girl; and you can... But it's a long story, and I must tell it as it goes. But, Madeleine, if you ever loved your poor old brother (and remember, your mother loved me, and we had the same father and bear the same name), read this letter carefully every word of it, and do what I ask you. And keep before your mind what I say here solemnly: *My life depends on you from the moment you get this.* Not that that may really matter much, for with my wretched health and the state of mind all this horrible worry has brought me to, I may die at any moment (I am subject to apoplectic fits and must be very careful, my doctor tells me), but still my life, such as it is, *does* depend on what you decide.

'Madeleine! for God's sake don't desert your brother! It is an awful thing to ask a girl to do, I know, but there is no one else I can trust; and I remember you were always a plucky little thing. Don't fail me, Madeleine! don't fail me. Remember, not alone your
brother's life, but the honour of our father's name depends on you from this moment.

'Do you remember sending me some time ago a packet of manuscript, Madeleine, which you found one day among some old letters and mementoes of my father? You had, as a little girl, carelessly stowed them away in your desk in the days of your mourning for him, and, little imagining what an important document chanced to be hidden away among the old letters and bills, etcetera, of which they were for the most part composed, you had never thought of examining them until one day chance brought this manuscript to light again after fifteen years. You saw then, to your surprise, that it bore the inscription, "To be given to my son Lancelot after my death," and you sent it on to me here. The story it contained is a strange one, Madeleine, and concerns our father. But strange as this story is, it is still more strange that it should have reached me at the moment when it did.

'You know that father was, for some years after the Mutiny, political agent at Poodoo-cottah in India, where he had considerable influence, and was very popular both with residents and natives.

'One evening, after he had been at Poodoo-
cottah about three years, he was seated on the verandah of his bungalow, smoking, and reading over some papers which it was necessary to forward to the Government on the following day. Mother was inside. She had retired to bed early that afternoon with a bad headache.

'Suddenly father looked up from his reading with a start. A man was standing before him with his finger on his lips. He was covered with mud, and travel-stained, as if he had come from a long journey; and as he stood there before father, with that strange gesture imploring silence, he had the air of a man hunted almost to the death.

'In a moment father recognised him as a former sergeant in his own regiment, a man named Wilson, one of the best of the non-commissioned officers, and a thoroughly good soldier.

'Amazed to see the man in such a plight, but preserving his presence of mind, and seeing that the sergeant imagined himself to be, or was, in some pressing danger (for Wilson was a V.C. man, and not a fellow to be easily terrified), father rose and led him into the house, where, after pulling down the blinds, he gave him some refreshment, and when
Wilson had somewhat recovered, questioned him as to the meaning of the adventure.

'‘It was a strange tale that he heard. At the time of the Mutiny, where Wilson won his V.C., there had been many opportunities of private looting, and certain soldiers who fought throughout that terrible struggle afterwards returned to England as rich men. Although Wilson had sold out of his regiment he had always been a quiet, well-conducted man, and father would not have suspected him of any desire for sudden wealth, or of ideas outside his own well-ordered career; nevertheless, it appeared that the sergeant had in some way or other become possessed of an object of exceedingly great value, and that the former owners of this treasure, being aware of its whereabouts, or at least suspecting them, Wilson had become the object of the most virulent persecution.

'‘How it had chanced that such a valuable object had found its way into Wilson's possession father did not state; but there must have been complete justification for the sergeant, or father, whose ideas of honour were, as you know, most rigid, would not have taken up his cause as he afterwards did.

'‘Well, it seemed that for some time pre-
vious to Wilson's appearance at father's residence, the man had been constantly followed and threatened, and at last, all other alternatives having failed, his life had twice been attempted in a mysterious and secret manner. His enemies, who were apparently the priests of a certain temple in Madura, appeared to be exceedingly powerful, and, hunted to desperation, the poor fellow had come at last to throw himself on father's protection.

'Wilson produced his treasure, after taking every precaution to avoid prying eyes, and father was, he said, amazed with its appearance, beauty and probable value. Its history was this:—

'The jewel, as it is perhaps best described, was an imitation of a lotus flower in full bloom, and carved from solid gold, the centre of the blossom being formed of a huge single yellow diamond whose radiance almost dazzled the two men even in the dimness of the unlighted room where they were seated.

'It appeared that in Madura, a collectorate about forty miles north of Poodoocottah, there stood the ruins of a Hindoo university and a great temple called the Pagoda of
Minakshi. This edifice, covering nearly twenty acres, was erected by Irimal Naik the Magnificent, and was celebrated for its nine tower-like gates and a tank called the Tank of the Golden Lotus, from a golden chair in which candidates for degrees used to sit. This chair, which took the form of a huge lotus, was of great value, but its chief beauty was the wonderful jewel which I have described, and which used to shine out from the centre of the back panel, above where the heads of the candidates rested.

' The Golden Lotus was known to have disappeared during the tumult occasioned by the Mutiny; and when at last the terror of those days had passed, a desperate search for its recovery was undertaken by the people connected with the temple, by whom it was regarded with great reverence. In some way, of which Wilson was ignorant, seeing that he had been very guarded, the jewel had been traced to his possession. Anonymously he had been offered varying sums for its return, and on refusing them he had been threatened, as I have said, and his life twice attempted.

'After father had asked many questions, and given the affair a considerable amount
of consideration, he finally decided to do what he could to assist Wilson, and my mother being informed of the facts of his story, Wilson was for a time hidden in the Residency.

'However, all father's efforts were useless. Wilson had not been at Poodocottah for a week when he was taken seriously ill, and died shortly afterwards, after exhibiting all the symptoms of an unnatural illness. He left the jewel which had cost him his life to a cousin in the same regiment; and father, greatly angered at a crime which he could not but impute to his own servants, but was unable to trace to any particular man, took up the heir's cause with increased ardour. Indeed, he eventually succeeded in effecting the man's escape with his treasure to Europe; but it was long before he himself recovered from the shock these events had given him.

'When my mother died father left the army, and retiring from the post of Agent at Poodocottah, returned to Europe. He was at that time a wealthy man, but, unused to an idle life, he sought distraction in speculation, and losing a large part of his fortune, he was compelled to retire to
France, where living was cheaper than in his own country. There he met your mother, as I remember her, a lovely young French-woman of noble birth, who adored her soldier husband. She was always kind to me, though I was only her step-son; and, had she lived, Madeleine, I should not have been in my terrible, terrible trouble—but it is, alas! too late to regret all that now.

'Father had already allowed the affair of Wilson and his sad death to pass to a certain extent from his memory, when one day a man, stopping him in the Place de la Concorde, recalled himself to memory as Roger, the cousin of the murdered sergeant, and the heir to the Golden Lotus.

'He appeared to be labouring under terrible agitation, and father could not help thinking how strangely his appearance recalled that of his cousin when he had found his way to the Residency at Poodoocottah on that evening long before. The man's nerves appeared completely shattered, and while he talked to father he trembled and glanced round him as if he momentarily anticipated the attack of some unseen enemy.

'Roger informed father that he had heard of his presence in Paris, and, remembering
his former kindness, wished to obtain from him still further assistance. He related how he had barely succeeded in reaching Europe before he had become aware that he was being pursued; and although, owing to the constant precautions he took and the fact that he was now in Europe instead of India, he had so far contrived to avoid danger, nevertheless he had not been able in any way to dispose of the Lotus, and there had not been a moment, night or day, which he had not felt might be his last. His apprehension had been greatly increased by the fact that, while in many ways they forced him to be aware of their presence, his enemies were yet absolutely unknown to him. The most he could be certain of was that they were not Hindoos, and probably they were but European emissaries of the priests whose hostility he had aroused.

'Seeing the condition the man was in, and fearing for his mind, if not his life, father advised him to make terms with the former owners of the Golden Lotus. However, to this advice Roger refused to pay any attention. He averred that he was unable to trust them sufficiently in any negotia-
tions; that his pride would not suffer him to give in where Wilson had persevered to the bitter end; and lastly, that in any case he had always that alternative open as a final resource. He also told father that he had arranged a scheme by which he hoped to escape from his troubles and attain security. It was for the furtherance of this scheme that he desired my father's assistance.

'The idea, the details of which Roger disclosed fully, was an ingenious and daring one, but for many reasons father was compelled to decline to have anything to do with it. It appeared that Roger, by bribing one of the minor authorities of a certain cemetery in Paris, and by working on his sympathies with a story of unhappy marital relations, had arranged a scheme of false decease and interment. The burial authorities were not so strict in those days as they are now; Roger's life was not insured; he had no friends or relatives in Paris; and it seemed probable that the death of an obscure English soldier would cause little comment or inquiry. It had been planned that for some time previous to the date of the supposititious interment, Roger should take lodgings with
his confederate, who was a bachelor, and who lived alone in the immediate neighbourhood of the cemetery.

'While father could not but sympathise with the poor fellow thus dwelling in terror of his life and fighting for his treasure, still, as I have said, he was obliged to refuse any part in an affair which was, after all, undoubtedly fraudulent in its object; and the two men parted at length, though without any bitterness on the side of Roger, who bore a lasting gratitude to my father for his earlier assistance.

'For some time after this meeting my father heard nothing further of Roger, and the affair had already again taken a diminishing importance in his memory, when one morning he received a letter in a strange handwriting from a town in Jamaica. The missive purported to come from the keeper of an hotel in that place, and enclosed also a second epistle elaborately secured and addressed to my father.

'The hotel-keeper begged to inform father that a gentleman named Roger, a guest at his hotel, being suddenly taken ill, had requested that the enclosed letter should be despatched to its address, together with full
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information concerning his—the guest’s—decease, should that event, as he anticipated, occur within the following twenty-four hours. The writer went on to say that this gentleman did indeed succumb very shortly to an illness whose symptoms resembled those resulting from the bite of a snake, though the medical man who attended had been unable to find a trace of any such accident to the deceased. Mr Roger had left a sum of money which he carried about him, and which amounted to five hundred pounds, to be forwarded, after the expenses of interment, etc., were discharged, to a Monsieur Guerin, at an address near Montrouje, Paris, and the enclosed letter to father.

'The writer had now carried out to the best of his ability the wishes of the deceased gentleman, and begged to remain, etc., etc.

'The letter which Roger had directed to be forwarded to his former chief was of great importance, and for some time caused father a considerable amount of anxiety and hesitation.

'The deceased Roger, addressing father with affection and respect as his old captain, and with gratitude for his kindness on a former occasion, expressed a wish that he
would read with care and deliberation what would be the writer's last words, and would take no offence, but comply with their intentions. The writer went on to recall his last meeting with my father, when he had confided to him the means by which he hoped to escape from the persecutions of certain enemies, and to preserve from them a treasure of great value which one life had already paid for, but which was, nevertheless, by every right his own. When father should chance to read these lines a second life would have been forfeited and, as the writer firmly believed, the bloody tally would be complete.

'It was Roger's earnest desire, he continued, writing as a man in constant anticipation of death, that father should accept as a final bequest, as the only living friend of the testator, that treasure which he had mentioned; and to that end he had provided instructions for its recovery.

'It appeared that the plan which Roger had made had succeeded in every particular. The false interment had taken place, and under another name he had contrived to escape from Europe, leaving the Golden Lotus in security. Unfortunately, while travelling to Jamaica, where he proposed
remaining until it might be safe to return again to Paris, he had had the misfortune to relax his accustomed caution, and had reason to fear that he had been recognised by an emissary of his enemies, who, in imagining him to be no more, had also left Europe, and chanced to be, by an unfortunate coincidence, a passenger on the same boat.

'Realising immediately his danger, he had set himself the task of composing this letter, knowing that any moment might be his last. He had chosen my father as his heir, for he felt that his pursuers had not suspected the real truth of his pretended interment at Montrouge, and would imagine that he had carried the Golden Lotus with him in his flight. And thus he anticipated that my father would be able to profit by his legacy undisturbed. Roger had taken means which would ensure this letter being forwarded to father on his decease (should his fears be realised and that event occur), and my father would also receive from his bankers on the Boulevard des Italiens a sealed letter containing information as to the whereabouts of the Lotus, and which they were instructed to place only in his hands. The writer continued that he had originally thought of
committing the Lotus itself to the charge of these bankers, but that he had felt convinced that the existence of a deposit of such value would have become known to the people who watched him, while his desire was to make it seem to have disappeared with him in his escape from Europe.

'On visiting the bank which Roger indicated, father received a sealed letter containing a plan of the position, in the burial ground of Montrouje, of the grave of a certain Henry Roger, Englishman, late of the 24th Regiment, and realised that he was heir to a fortune which it would be exceedingly difficult for him ever to benefit by; for to apply for permission to open Roger's grave would invariably attract attention to the fraud which had taken place, and would connect him with its contrival.

'Apart from these considerations, there were other reasons which decided father to refrain from any attempt to recover the Golden Lotus, and among these, perhaps, the chief was the decided opposition of your mother. She had taken a fierce hatred even to the mention of a thing which had already caused the death of two brave men, and she vowed that she would rather starve, if need
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be, than ever in any way benefit by Roger's bequest and thus draw down upon the husband she loved so dearly the fate of Wilson and his cousin.

'Father had still in those days an income sufficient for their needs, and the love he bore your mother made her wishes law to him. Thus he bowed to her decision, and for many years the Golden Lotus has remained undisturbed in its grave at Montrouje.

'That is the story, Madeleine, which the MS. contained, and which my father intended to reach me after his death.'
CHAPTER X

LANCELOT'S LETTER CONTINUED

'When I was nearly twenty, as you know, Madeleine, your poor mother died, and it soon became evident that father—then a man well on in years—would not be long in following her. He himself indeed seemed well aware of this fact, and he speedily began to give his mind to securing our future.

'It chanced that a friend of his early days was at that time about to retire from the business of tea-planting in Ceylon; and father, hearing of the occasion, parted with a considerable amount of his capital in order to purchase for me the good-will and estate of this gentleman, disposing at the same time, by will, of the remainder of his property, in equal shares between yourself and me. He also arranged for a future home for you with an old lady, a cousin,
who had no near relations, and who willingly promised you her protection and love in the unfortunate contingency of his death while you were yet too young to look after yourself. As for me, I was to proceed to Ceylon on the completion of the arrangements concerning the plantation.

'I spoke before of business troubles, Madeleine, which beset me, and which have ruined my health. I have always been unlucky! I do not know why it should be so. I have always done my best, but things seem to go wrong with me whatever I may do.

'At first I got on well enough in Ceylon. The place father bought for me was a good one, and paid very well; but it was small. I could never have made a fortune there; and when I went in for a larger plantation I had bad luck—bad seasons—a bad manager. I was swindled, too. The fellow who sold to me deliberately cheated me. But I struggled on until the last. Then when I had to give it up and return to the old place, things seemed to have gone wrong there too, and your little fortune went after the rest, as you know.

'It was good of you, Madeleine, to let me
have your money, but I knew old Mrs Harcourt was looking after you, and I did think I was safe to turn it into more. However, it is no use crying over spilt milk, is it? I would have sent you money, by the way, afterwards, when I heard that the old lady was dead; but you seemed to be getting on so well, what with your painting and music lessons—and I was so pushed—so devilishly worried and harassed, that I had hardly a penny I could call my own.

'If you knew all I have gone through you would be sorry for me, Madeleine, and think your own peaceful life paradise—and I have had years of this kind of thing, too—years which have ruined my health. I told you, I think, that I am subject to apoplectic fits, and the doctor is very anxious about me. He says that any sudden shock or excitement may be easily fatal to me.

'And this brings me to the object of my letter.

'Oh, Madeleine! when I think how much depends on your doing what I ask, I hardly dare continue to write. Suppose you refuse! Suppose you are changed and don't love your old brother any longer. Madeleine! you don't bear me any malice about that money,
do you? I swear I could not help it going! Besides, if you assist me now I shall be in a position to pay you back ten times over. Well, this is it.

'About a year or two ago I made the acquaintance of a man named Carter. He was a young fellow out from home, with a good bit of money, and a father worth Lord knows how much. He wanted to start tea-planting, and he came into partnership with me in this larger plantation which I told you of. Well, as you know, we did badly over the venture—in fact, we dropped a good bit of money—more than we could pay. Out of good-nature I took Carter with me back to the old place, up Trincomalee way, which father had bought for me, and which I had never parted with. However, as I have said, we did not do well even there, and of course we were both very short of capital. It was a bad year for us tea-planters, and we needed money to keep us going till a good season came round.

'I advised Carter to write to his father and explain matters, and try to get help from him. Well, he did write, but some enemy of mine must have told lies about me, for he replied with a nasty letter, and
refused to do anything for us. We struggled on for a time, but everything seemed to go wrong. The crop was a failure; and the men who held our bills pressed us, while the banks would not extend our credit.

'Ruin was staring us in the face, and we did not know what on earth to do, or which way to turn.

'It is useless to go further into details, you would not comprehend; but you must understand that we were in a frightful position, and had we not been in such a fix, and my health getting worse every day, what happened would never have come about.

'Carter's father was a very old man and Carter was the only child; so of course whatever money the old chap left was sure eventually to be the son's. Besides that he was enormously wealthy, and what we wanted to keep us going for a time would have been a mere flea-bite to him. Well, it did seem hard with just a stroke of his pen this old man could help us, and one of us his only son, too! And at last we . . . well, it is no use my explaining what we did. You would think it worse than it was, perhaps. Women never understand
those kind of things; and you could not realise what it meant for me, who had always been looked up to and respected, to feel that, just for the want of a few thousands, I might become a beggar, and ruin that poor young fellow too.

'To cut things short, we made some use of old Carter's name, which put us straight for the time. After all, it made really no difference to him. A little luck and we could easily have made it right. At any-rate, it gave us a year to look about us, and it seemed at the time the only thing to do.

'That is what I used to tell Carter too, but, poor chap, he was only a boy, practically, and he hadn't the pluck to look things in the face. Instead of setting to work and making the best of things, he seemed to lose all interest in the business after this, and took to knocking about with a lot of queer fish whom he would have known better than to be seen with if he had been older, and taking too many pegs, and generally making a mess of things. To add to this, he quarrelled fatally with his father, and things looked black indeed for us.

'It was at this time that I received your
letter, Madeleine, and learned from the manuscript you sent me the story of the Golden Lotus.

'You can imagine the effect the tale had upon me at first. I was on the brink of ruin, and I was told that there in Paris, in a spot known only to me in the whole world, lay that wonderful jewel, which would make me a free man and able to face the world again.

'Yet this East is a strange place, Madeleine. Things do not pass and be forgotten here as in the newer civilisations; and although for nights my sleep was haunted by visions of that fortune buried in the grave at Montrouje, and for many days I planned out secret visits to that dismal hiding-place, for a time I contented myself with imagining alone. Fool that I was, and yet I know not! The loss of the Golden Lotus had made a great stir at one time, and its disappearance so sudden, so unexplained, so complete, must have caused wonder and suspicion to those who pursued so relentlessly the men in whose possession it had once been known to be. I had always an idea that I, as the son of a man who had assisted Wilson and his cousin, must have been an object of interest still to those people. I felt that to such men as
they and their fellows were, time would bring no changes. They would not forget, even though they were themselves powerless to move. And the fate of those two brave men—so sudden and irrevocable—terrified me.

'Did I feel all this, I wonder as I write, or do I speak under the prick of a later, surer knowledge? I know not, but, good God! how true the words are.

'One day—it was a cruel day for me, Madeleine, and God knows where it will all end!—Carter chanced to introduce me to one of those friends of his, a Dr Clay. Now remember this name, Madeleine, though perhaps the fellow has many others; and above all, remember my description of him, for it may mean everything to both of us!

'He was supposed to be a doctor by profession, this Clay, but apparently he had means of his own and was travelling about merely for pleasure. At all events, no one knew his business in Ceylon, though he seemed to know everyone else's, and was on nodding terms with all the best men here. But I think none of them seemed to like him much. I shall never forget the first time I met him. I know I took a dislike to the man from that moment, whether instinctive
or not I cannot say. He is a tall, dark fellow, about thirty-five, I should imagine. He has black hair and a black moustache, and very cold bright eyes; and it is a funny thing that although it is evident he has passed a great part of his life in the East, his skin is very white—not exactly pale, but white! I wish I could describe him to you better, but I will put it in this way. You may see a hundred men who answer to this description and you will perhaps think each one is he. When you see him, Dr Clay, you won't think at all about it. You will know it is he! Do you understand what I mean? He is that kind of man. I cannot explain it better.

'Well, this fellow was very pleasant and agreeable; and after my first moment of dislike we got on fairly well together. He had been everywhere, and seemed to know most things. I never met a man better up in Cingalese, and he could be the most entertaining companion possible when he chose, and with us he did choose for a long time. As for Carter, he swore by the man; nothing was good enough for "Clay," and they were together often when I was not present.

'As time passed I forgot, to a certain extent, my dislike for Dr Clay, as I have
said. He had a way of gaining one's confidence without appearing to desire it, and one found oneself involuntarily, under the influence of his fascinating manner and presence, telling him things that one would not have thought of disclosing in cold blood. Good God! What a fool I was! What a fool! But he may yet find that there are as clever people alive as himself. I am a good-natured chap—too good-natured! It is not being able to refuse anyone that has been my ruin, but I am bad when I am roused, and so Dr Clay may yet find!

'What fiend possessed me I do not know, but one day I was fool enough—triple fool enough!—to blurt out something of the Golden Lotus business to this man. We had been for a trip up country, the three of us—myself, Clay and Carter. Clay had been showing us some native life which, long as I had known the country, surprised even me. We had had an exciting day and a tiring one. And when evening came we had felt inclined to take life easily, and I daresay a peg or two of pretty bad liquor may have affected me. At anyrate, I started a yarn about this Lotus affair. It began in some foolish way—I fancy some sneering
remark of Clay's about money commenced it—and I boasted of the wealth I might have had if I had had the courage to become the possessor of that jewel in its grave at Montrouje.

'Of course I didn't mention where the thing was, and had I been myself I should have known better than to say anything about it at all; but Clay led me on with his sneering manner, and one thing and another, until heaven knows what might not have come out if I had not caught his eyes fixed on mine with such a devilish glitter in them as quite startled me. It was as if he had some keen personal interest in, and knowledge of, the subject; and, indeed, it is likely enough he may have had some cognisance of the Golden Lotus's history, for he was a dab at Hindoo legends and things of that kind, and what he did not know about their religious affairs was not worth knowing. Fortunately he showed his hand too plainly and I was a little too clever for him and pulled myself up in time. Yet what a fool I am to write like this. What does my cleverness matter now? The devil was too much for me in the end anyway!

'We parted shortly after this. Carter and
I went down to Colombo again, and Clay left for India on a trip, as he said. I can guess now where he went. However, we saw no more of him for some time, and Carter, I must say, seemed worse after he left than while we had his companionship. I saw little of him, and when we did meet he appeared nervous and half afraid of me. I was soon to know the reason for his behaviour, though at the time it puzzled me.

‘I was seated one day in my office—I had an office in Colombo, where I transacted business connected with our plantation and other affairs that I had on hand—when a gentleman was announced to see me. The visitor entered. It was Dr Clay. I was surprised to notice a change in his manner towards me. It was decidedly cool, but I did not take much notice of that. It is a peculiarity with the man that one’s feelings towards him seem to vary as his manner towards one varies. Perhaps that is the case with most people when you come to think of it, but certainly it was so in an excessive degree with him. If he intends to be pleasant I defy anyone to keep him at a distance. If he means to be unfriendly, in-
stinctively one feels one's antipathies aroused against him.
‘From the moment Clay entered my office I seemed to forget that we had ever been friends, and to be on my guard for the first blow to come from him.
‘I had not long to wait.
‘He flung himself into an easy-chair facing me and smiled that infernal cold smile of his which always seems to rouse my worst passions. He has two smiles, the brute!
‘“It's all up, Durand,” he said quietly.
‘I would not show the fellow that I feared him, though at his words I felt myself tremble and break into a cold sweat. “What do you mean?” I said carelessly.
‘“I think you know,” he returned. “If you don't, I'll tell you. I mean old Carter's bill at twelve months for six thousand pounds, signed by yourself and young Carter jointly, and backed by Carter senior.”
‘I turned away for a moment, pretending to turn over some papers on my desk. I am subject to rushes of blood to the head, and I couldn't collect my thoughts for a moment. At last I stammered out, “Ah, yes. Here is the date. There is another three months to run yet, though. Besides,
Dunkin will renew, of course, in my case, if necessary."

"Dunkin will not renew!"
"How do you know?" I gasped. "What authority have you to say so?"
"Dunkin will not renew—because he no longer holds the bill."
"Good God!" I said blankly.
"A friend of mine holds it now. Perhaps you know him, too, a man called Sing in the next street."

'Now, this was death to me if it were true. Sing was the worst Jew in Colombo though he was a Chinaman.

"It's a lie," I cried. "Dunkin is a gentleman! He promised us that the bill should not leave his hands. He swore he would renew! He would have no dealings with a man like Sing."

'Clay laughed. "Dunkin is like the rest of us, only mortal, especially about the finances. Sing could buy him up, body and soul, twenty times over, so when I asked him—ordered him, I should say—to get this bill for me, it was merely the question of an idle quarter of an hour for him."

'I stared at him in amazement. "Ordered
him?" What could be the position of a man who could order Sing to do anything? Sing! the reputed millionaire, and the hardest, cruellest Jew this side of the line!

'I'm afraid I gave way for a moment. When I raised my head again I looked straight into the mouth of a pistol, which Clay held in his hands. "Gently! gently!" he said, waving me back. "Keep cool! I am a doctor—take my advice! Unbutton your waistcoat and collar and breathe slowly. You are a red-haired man, Durand, and you have a red complexion and a very thick neck. Just at this moment the veins of your upper extremities are getting badly congested. That is all you want, to take care of yourself. Keep cool and don't try your brain too much. With that magnificent physique of yours, and your huge vitality, you might live for years yet—but not if you breathe as you are breathing now!"

'I made an effort to recover myself. "Yes, yes!" I said, "you have the bill, or your agent has. Well, well! What then? One moment, though—how did you know?"
"Can't you guess a simple thing like that?"

"Young Carter? Curse him! No, not curse him, poor young chap! he's a fool. He couldn't be a match for you. It's not his fault."

"No, he's all right," said Clay, carelessly. "I am much obliged to him. It wasn't his fault, as you remark. The thing was heavy on his mind, and he had to tell it to someone. It is well for me, and for you too, my dear Durand, for you too, that I was the one he chose for his confidant."

'I sat for a moment in thought. "You must have given Dunkin full value for the bill?" I said at length musingly.

"I gave nothing. Sing did. Yes, he gave full value for the little bill. We shall get full value in return."

"That is just it," I began. "How will you—?"

'Clay sat up and fixed his eyes on me. "I suppose you can't imagine how, friend Durand?"

"For the life of me I cannot."

'Clay rose to his feet, and opening the
door looked out. Then he closed it again, and coming to me, put his hand on my shoulder. "What about the Golden Lotus?" he said softly.
CHAPTER XI

LANCELOT'S LETTER CONTINUED

'For a while after Dr Clay left me I sat almost overwhelmingly, attempting to review calmly the changes the last few minutes had made in my future prospects. Then a wild idea came to me that there was still a hope.

'I put on my hat and hurried to Dunkin's office.

'As luck would have it, he was at home, and I was shown directly into his private room.

'Dunkin himself was a tall, handsome fellow, very popular in Colombo, and a personal friend of my own. Had he been a wealthy man he would have lent me the money off his own bat, I am sure. As it was, I knew he had been obliged to arrange the affair in a business fashion, in order to obtain a certain amount of the loan from his own bankers.'
Knowing the man as I did, I could not understand how it had come about that he had consented under any circumstances to let the bill pass out of his hands; and, until I entered his office, I had a mad hope that Clay might have lied to me when he told me the paper was in Sing's possession.

However, the first glimpse of Dunkin's face dashed that hope. He turned first red, and then pale, as he caught my eye, and commenced to stammer nervously. "Good-day, Durand," he said hurriedly. "I am awfully busy—what can I do for you? You haven't come—I hope you haven't come about that bill?"

'I stopped him. "Then it is true what Clay told me?" I said sternly.

"'My dear Durand," he said, rubbing his forehead nervously, "I hope it is not a very serious matter to you? You will, I fear, think me a blockhead not to have kept my word regarding negotiating your bill. But you really don't know the position I was in."

'I waved aside his apologies. "Then the bill is in Sing's hands?" I asked.

'He nodded, avoiding my eye and biting his lips. Then he sprang to his feet quickly. "Good God, Durand! you look quite ill!"
he cried. "I am awfully sorry it is so bad as that! But how can it affect you so much after all? You will have the same time allowed you to pay in, and Sing will renew, I suppose. It will only cost you a little more than we should have charged you, that is all."

"'You have ruined me, Dunkin," I groaned.

'Then I saw the surprise in his face, and attempted to pull myself together. It would not do to let him guess the truth while there was any kind of hope that it might not transpire.

'"That Sing is such a blackguard!" I gasped. "Once a man is in his hands—"

'Dunkin nodded. "Relentless! but I daresay when the time comes I shall be able to give you a hand with the interest," he said good-naturedly. I noticed, however, that there was a queer note of hesitation in his voice; and for a moment we sat staring at one another blankly.

'"You really know that Sing will not renew, Dunkin!" I said after a moment. "You are trying to give me false hopes. But to tell you the truth, it matters little to me if he does not. There is more than that behind it all! Why did you play me this trick?"

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‘Dunkin looked up quickly with a flush on his cheek. “My dear Durand, I can only reply in your own words, ‘There was more than that behind it all.’ I am sorry—more sorry than words can tell—if I have done you any harm. But you surely don’t imagine me such a blackguard as to do you harm wilfully? I was powerless, absolutely powerless.”

“Surely you were not afraid of Sing?” I said bitterly.

‘Dunkin sighed. “Durand, that man Sing could have broken me as a stone shatters a pane of glass—as he could break men whom you would imagine far beyond his reach. I am only one of the smaller fry here, and I have a wife and kids to look after. He has influence, too, in many queer ways. . . . Excuse me, Durand, I am going to ask you a strange question. You are aware—you cannot help being so, living the years you have in Ceylon—that things are hardly run so straightforwardly in these Eastern lands as they are in the newer civilisations. There are wheels within wheels, and hidden springs which govern men’s actions—secret societies, religious and the opposite, abound; and sometimes specta-
tors who would remain spectators only get drawn into the whirl of the machinery against their will as a man gets caught up in the driving-belt of an engine. Are you a free agent, Durand?"

"As regards the subject you hint at, perfectly," I replied, surprised.

'Dunkin looked at me dubiously. "Are you aware of having given offence to anyone in particular who might be connected with —let us keep up the metaphor and say—one of these machines? Remember, the smallest cog-wheel can influence the whole force."

'I hesitated. My thoughts flew back to my interview with Clay.

'As if he had read my mind Dunkin went on: "If it had been so I could have given you a warning that would perhaps have proved of service to you. There are two men whom I should point out to you, and I should say, make your peace at any price with one of them, whichever it is that you may have offended. These two men are Jan Sing and a person whom you have already mentioned—a man named Clay."

"I don't know Sing," I said eagerly, "but
this man Clay—what is he? What do you know of him?"

'Dunkin sighed. "I can't tell you, Durand; I wish I could. It is impossible, however. He is a very important part of one of the greatest of these machines. That is all I am at liberty to say. He is a dangerous enemy—but that you know already. If you can, get straight with him. I don't think he is vindictive, and it ought to be possible. I can say no more. Come and see me again," and Dunkin commenced to shuffle the papers about on his desk. I took the hint and left him.

'My little card-castle of hope had fallen to the ground and I realised how feeble were my chances in the hands of this man Clay and his confederate Sing. Nothing but compliance with their demands seemed possible now. Sing held our bill. He had bought it knowing well the power it would give them. Poor young Carter, who would go down with me when the smash came, had blurted out the secret of the bill to Clay, and my own foolish boasting had been the commencement of the affair. That was the solution of the business, evidently, and that accounted for Clay's trip to India. He must have known something
of the history of the Golden Lotus, and, after my disclosures, had departed to learn further details, or to formulate plans. Was there yet any hope for me?

'Yet what chance had I of escape? Three months! Yes, there were three months before the bill became due... but now these men knew the truth about it, and how long should I have if I defied them?

'The next day as I sat in my office Clay came to me again. He was as cool as ever, but there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes that was new there.

"You have been thinking, friend Durand!" he said gaily, as he gave me a quick glance. "I knew you would, and I thought it better to leave you to yourself. Well?"

"Well," I returned coldly, "I am in your power, it seems. What do you want?"

"The Golden Lotus, of course!" he replied lightly. "What else should you suppose we want?"

"I haven't got the Golden Lotus," I returned savagely.
"Of course you haven't! But you will get it!"

"I will get it?"

"Yes. You know where it was hidden—where Roger hid it. You did not mention the spot, I fancy, in that very indiscreet confidence of yours some weeks ago. But, if it is not a rude question, friend Durand, why the deuce did you never get it before—instead of giving such very compromising bills for such comparatively small sums of money?"

I stared at him. I wondered how much he knew. "It was not such an easy task," I returned. "There were considerable difficulties, as you will find. Besides, I did not care to meet the fate of the only two Europeans who had ever had the Lotus in their possession."

"Don't say 'as I shall find,'" said Durand, sneeringly. "It will be you who will find the difficulties—if there are to be any. But as regards the fate of the two men you speak of, if you fall in with our ideas I think I can promise you a safe conduct."

"So you want me to get possession of this jewel—which, mind you, is mine by
right!—and hand it over to you and your confederates,” I said angrily.

“‘I do!’

“‘Otherwise?'"

“‘Otherwise,” murmured Clay — “well, otherwise certain disclosures will be made to certain people—to old Carter, for instance—to Dunkin, for instance—to Sing, who holds your bill—to . . . well, there is no end to it! Or, rather, there is an end—for you!’

“‘And what do I get out of it?’

“‘You get your bill back again for six thousand pounds. And, let me tell you, Durand, that bill should really be worth a great deal more than six thousand pounds to you. Think what it would mean if it came out what the well-known and respected Mr Durand had done!”

“I stopped him with an oath. “Curse you!” I cried, losing my temper. “Curse you, and those who are in league with you in this damnable scheme! The Golden Lotus is mine! and you want to rob me of it and leave me a beggar at the same time!”

“Clay laughed at my rage.

“‘For thirty years you have troubled little about your property—that is all I can
say, Durand! Why didn't you think of the Lotus sooner?"

"I tell you there are difficulties!" I said sullenly.

'Clay shrugged his shoulders carelessly. "There are worse difficulties in front of you, of your own contriving, too," he remarked. "Besides, as I have said already, you will be allowed—we shall allow you—to secure the Lotus."

"Even if you did . . ." I commenced, and then I stopped. I was not going to tell him by chance any more than he might already know. I tried to collect my thoughts. These men had me in a corner and I was a desperate man. On one side I saw the prison open for me (think of it, Madeleine!—the prison for your father's son—the shame! the disgrace!), on the other side I saw ruin! For even should I succeed in rescuing the Lotus and earning freedom from the clutches of these men by handing it over to them, what would my position be? With the six thousand pounds of Carter's bill taken from the sum of my liabilities, disaster was nevertheless assured, and with it disgrace, though of a milder kind. I felt that I was fighting for my life.
LANCELOT'S LETTER CONTINUED

"With the power you impute to yourself, and the mysterious force behind you, I am surprised," I said, "that you do not recover the Lotus without my aid."

'Clay laughed. "I see what you mean. You imply that we are not clever enough to know where it is hidden! Well, I must confess that fellow Roger did succeed in puzzling us at the time. I say 'us', though of course that was long before I had anything to do with the affair. Still, your worthy father was watched while he lived, Durand, and I fancy there have even been people who took an interest in you, his son. Those whom I serve are thorough, and they never forget. But at least give us this credit—we are going to recover the Golden Lotus at last!"

"You are very confident," I could not resist saying.

"Unlike that noble animal the horse, we know our own strength," said Clay, lightly. "But take care, Durand!" he continued with a change of tone, "no foolery! We are not to be trifled with. Both Roger and Wilson were clever and determined men—with ten times your courage in addition. Their qualities, however, did not save them from
an unpleasant fate. You will be watched, I warn you, and every movement will be known. We shall not be deceived again. One false step and it will be your last. My dear Durand, you are an Englishman, and you cannot realise—even I, who am half a child of the East, cannot entirely comprehend the feelings which the loss of the Golden Lotus aroused at the time. And, let me tell you, the resolution to recover the thing has never died."

"'Roger and Wilson were murdered, but they baffled you," I said.

'"For a time, yes! For a time—infinitesimal compared to the long ages which saw the Golden Lotus revered! But they for whom I work believe in Time—that Time brings its revenges, my friend Durand! And indeed, does it not strike you as strange—but perhaps you are not superstitious?—that after all these years the affair should be brought to light again here in the East? That you should confide in me your knowledge of the hiding-place? That Carter should confess to me the secret which places you in our power? That for some reason or other you should not attempt to profit by your knowledge until you met me?"
I was silent.

"What are your plans?" I asked after a moment.

"These. There are three months before Mr Carter senior will be called upon to pay the bill which he is supposed to have backed. And we shall allow you three months clear. At the end of that time you will hand over to me the Golden Lotus intact. Ways and means you must arrange for yourself—they do not concern us. To all appearances you will be as free as air; and I fancy I can promise you that the rest of your creditors will not press you for the time. But remember, you will be watched, as I have told you; and if you went arm-in-arm with me during all that time your actions would not be more tied, more circumscribed than they will be. I tell you so for your own good. But with all respect to you, Durand, I fancy you are no Roger! And now I must leave you. Forgive me for keeping you so long from your business. You must have many affairs to settle before you start for—where? Ah, well, it doesn't matter where! I shall be with you in spirit. Be here to meet me, with the Golden Lotus in your hand, on this day three months. If
sooner, so much the better; but don't be late. I should be sorry to cause you any pain, friend Durand, and my friends would be sorry too. They bear you no malice. They only want the Lotus. Good-bye!"

'And he left me.

'It is now some weeks since last I saw Clay and I have spent the time—Heaven knows how! But I have planned a scheme that may yet thwart these devils, Madeleine! You must help me! Without you I am helpless. I have thought it all out, though God knows my brain has sometimes almost given way beneath the strain and anxiety of the time. I cannot stand it much longer, Madeleine. I cannot stand it much longer! . . .

'Listen! this is how I have worked it out. I shall be watched, that is certain! Wherever I go, or whatever I do, I shall be followed. I am shadowed already. I have found that out. Heaven knows if this letter will ever reach you even. I do not know the extent of "their" powers yet. But I am taking precautions, and it is probable that you will receive it safely. It is useless for me to attempt to escape them; and you are
my only chance. I shall leave to-morrow for Jamaica, as secretly as I am able. Jamaica was the last spot where Roger was known to be—where he was murdered, in fact. They will, I hope—they must—connect my stealthy departure with this knowledge. I do not believe them to have the faintest idea where the hiding-place of the Golden Lotus really is. If they had, they would have recovered it before this. The supposition that Roger contrived to conceal his treasure in Jamaica before he died will seem reasonable to them.

'Now, Madeleine, you know where the Golden Lotus really is, and you know the terrible danger I am in. I send you, with this letter, the plan of the grave in Montrouge Cemetery, where Roger was supposed to be interred. You must get someone to help you—some person in whom you have absolute confidence. Remember it must be someone you have known for a long time—a mere acquaintance will not do; it might be one of these people themselves. You must tell this person, under a vow of secrecy, the story of the Golden Lotus or so much of it as is needful. This is absolutely necessary. No one would help you
to break into a real grave—no one you could trust. This grave is not a real one, as you know!...

'Oh, my God, Madeleine! I don't know what to do! I don't know you. It is fifteen years since I saw you, and you were a little girl then! This is no work for a woman, yet what can I do? There is no one else—there is no one else. You seem a woman of character from what I know of you, and from your letters. You must do it! You must do it! My life—our name—everything hangs on you.

'There will, I anticipate, be little real difficulty. All that will be required will be courage and someone you can trust. This grave is nearly thirty years old—the grave of an unknown English soldier. By the plan I send you it appears to be situated in a corner of the cemetery near the boundary wall, a spot no longer used. The wall looks on to a deserted piece of waste ground. The place could not have been better chosen—as of course it was chosen—for the purpose! You will have to go at dusk. The grave is not deep. There is a coffin, of course—a plain oak one with Roger's name carved upon it. It contains
nothing but a few pieces of lead and a small box with the Lotus inside.

'For God's sake have courage, Madeleine! Think, when you open that box, all your fears will vanish away, and you will see the wonderful jewel which will save your brother's life and our name and make us rich.

'Once I have put Clay off the scent, and you have got the Lotus, I shall have no fear. I shall be able to dispose of it easily enough. I can pay Carter. He will not be vindictive when he gets the money. He cannot hurt me without harming his son. When he is settled with I am out of reach of the law, and I think I know where to go and live upon the money I shall have and yet be out of the way of Clay and his friends. He shall see if I have not the courage of Roger, as well as the brains to baffle him. Immediately I have given him the slip I shall join you in Paris. You must be careful. The responsibility will be, for a time, tremendous. Yet, if you are cautious, and the friend you choose is sure, and is not told too much, there is only one thing that can ruin us—it is that Clay should have you watched meanwhile.
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

'Yet I cannot think that likely! I have written this letter in my own office. No one has been in, and when I have finished it I shall walk straight down to the General Post-Office and put it into the box, together with a dozen other letters that I have written. No one will see the address before it reaches the box.

'I don't fancy Clay and his people will do much tampering with Her Majesty's mails. They are not likely either to follow this letter to its destination in Paris and intercept it before it reaches you. (If they do then I am a dead man.) But they might—I do not say they will—send over to watch you. You must trust no one! Especially fear anyone answering to the description of Clay himself. If you see or hear of him, at once give up everything and wait till you hear from me.

'Can I tell you anything more? No. I must trust to chance and your own strength of character. Will these fail me? Not if you are your father's daughter! Remember my position is that I am now defying these men—I am pitting my wits and your courage against their mysterious powers. One slip and I am a dead man. I don't suppose they
would hurt you—why should they? But they won't forgive me.

'Now, Madeleine, good-bye! When we meet again, shall I have a sister to be proud of? LANCELOT DURAND.'
CHAPTER XII

STILL NO NEWS OF MDLLE. DURAND

This was the letter which must have descended like a thunderbolt upon Madeleine Durand shortly before I arrived in Paris, and, knowing her as I felt I did, I could not doubt the effect it must have had upon her. She would not realise, as I realised, the utter selfishness of the man who could write such a letter to a girl—the cowardice that could seek to make her the means by which he might escape the consequences of his ill-doing, the brutality of asking her, a woman, to undertake such a task as he had forced upon her by the arguments he used. No, she would not realise these things, I felt, for he was her brother; and, as she had already parted with her little fortune, and left herself at the mercy of poverty and want, so she would cast herself, for his sake, into this gulf too, to sink or swim as fate
might decree. By nature haughty, proud of her father's name, and fond of her worthless brother, how could she avoid, after the letter I had read, feeling that she stood between him and the ruin of all that made life worth living to them both, and stood, alas! alone.

I could realise the agony she must have experienced when she first became aware of what it rested with her to accomplish, and accomplish quickly, if her aid was to be of any avail. There could be no respite for her. No time was given her to hesitate. To write and implore delay or reprieve was impossible. Durand had impressed on her how brief a period had been allowed him, and she could but be aware that every delay might prove fatal. And so, with a courage that recalled the heroines of old, this delicate girl—with only another woman to help her—had attempted a task from which the boldest man might well have shrunk.

For it must have been so. That must be the explanation of the scene I had witnessed through the mysterious holes in my wall on the night when fate had made me so strangely a witness of her return, exhausted
and hopeless, to her home. The two women had failed—as how could it be otherwise, in spite of their courage?—and in failing they must have realised that every moment danger of discovery was threatening them both. They must have seen the news of their attempt in the papers, as I had done, and she, Madeleine Durand, must have known, in addition to the certainty of her own peril, the agony of having failed her brother. And what had her position been afterwards? At the end of her resources—her pupils lost—her little home necessarily abandoned—almost friendless—her brother's name and even his life threatened! No wonder that she had for one brief moment seen escape from her troubles only in death and sought to end her life.

And I, who would have helped her, had but added to her terror, for I had been the one to inform her of this man Denver's presence on the scene—this man whose coming she had been warned of—for I could not doubt that the Doctor Denver who had been so mysteriously connected with my knowledge of that part of her story was the Doctor Clay of Durand's letter.

I strove to pierce through the darkness
of the affair with the means this letter had placed at my disposal, but one thing yet remained inexplicable to me, and it gave me a sinking of the heart on Mdlle. Durand's account as I thought of it. This was Denver's presence in Paris. How had he chanced to arrive so *apropos*? How was it that he was here in Paris?

Could it be that Durand had not over-estimated his powers and had contrived to give Clay the slip? Yet that did not seem probable. Durand had intended to lure Clay after him to Jamaica in order to leave Madeleine time to secure the Golden Lotus. As it was, Clay had been in Paris even before Madeleine could make the attempt. Indeed, it seemed to me, from the data I had to go upon, that he must have left Ceylon almost simultaneously with the dispatch of Durand's letter.

Then if Clay had not followed Durand (and it seemed assured that he had not), but had come on in haste to Paris, his actions appeared to point to a conclusion that I hardly cared to face.

Heaven knows I could feel little pity for the writer of the letter which had so evilly affected Madeleine Durand's fortunes; but
yet, in a way, perhaps because he was her brother, and so interesting to me, I could not help feeling a thrill of fear at the thought that his double-dealing might have come to the knowledge of his enemies, and that he might already have met his fate. If so, where was he now? Lying, like Roger, murdered in Jamaica?

My speculations wandered to the strange romance revealed in Durand's letter to his sister, and the jewel which had already caused so much misery. Was this man Denver then at last cognisant of its hiding-place? And a flash of understanding seemed to illuminate my brain. Yes! He knew the part that had been forced upon Madeleine by her brother—he knew the secret at last. I could not doubt it. Preferring to let her take the risk of that visit to Montrouge—or for some other reason willing to play a passive rôle—he had hired the rooms from which he had been able to overlook her actions, and, spying upon her, had hoped to act upon the first occasion. Probably thus he had even succeeded in learning the very day on which the two women intended to make their attempt, for they would not suspect
the manner in which they were watched. Why, I wondered, had he given up the rooms before that day should come? This was a mystery to me. I could not comprehend it; and could only suppose that he had in some way anticipated the failure of the enterprise, and so withdrawn for the time from what would be a dangerous neighbourhood.

What a strange part had been mine in all this affair! I could appreciate now, as I looked back, the fear the two women had expressed at my description of Denver and my disclosure of his presence in the house. I could understand their first mistrust of myself, the terror shown so vividly by Mdlle. Durand on the night when I had brought to her the ring which seemed to prove her visit to Montrouje. I could realise now, too, Denver's doubts of a man who was interested in this girl, and who might even aid her against himself should occasion arise. That accounted for his attempt to scare me from the field by his pretended disclosure of their mutual relations. Probably he imagined that he had succeeded in his trick, for he could not be aware how much more I now
knew of Madeleine Durand and of himself.

I wondered for a moment if he had been baffled, as I had been, by my neighbour's hasty flight. What a fool I was! No! Of course he had not! He had received her note, and probably knew her whereabouts—even was still watching her. It was almost certain, it seemed to me, that she would have informed me of her destination in that letter which I had so unfortunately missed; and this man was probably still watching her. Would he, I wondered, himself now attempt the recovery of the treasure he was after, and, succeeding, leave Madeleine in peace? Without considering Durand in the matter I almost felt a wish that he might.

Meanwhile my torture was, what could I do to help her? Without money, without friends, save for her old companion, pursued by her brother's enemies, what would she do? Where would she go? It seemed a secret that I could not fathom unaided. My advertisements had remained unanswered; all my researches had been unsuccessful. What must be the next step?

There was one means by which I could
find Madeleine and her maid, I knew, so that they were still in Paris. But that means I dared not use. To the French police, even as in the days of Fouché, though perhaps not to so great an extent, everything is known. You cannot take up your abode in Paris, for ever so short a time, but your name, description and all important personal particulars are in the possession of those authorities whose business it is to look after les maurs. At the mercy of your concierge, always a very willing agent, your comings and goings are known, your visitors noted, your parcels and letters examined, your habits, your actions, your very disposition become objects of speculation and classification. You may disappear one day, you may flit ever so silently, but, if you remain in Paris, one morning there will come the inevitable ring at your door-bell, you will be saluted under your old name (which you have changed so discreetly) and your creditor (whom you thought to have so slyly dodged) will face you with a smile and his little bill. You have taken up your residence under a fatherly eye, you see, and your new father looks after you—and your creditors too!
But the police! I did not want to turn that fatherly eye on Madeleine Durand if it could be avoided, for, inquiry once started, who knew where it would stop? No! the police would not do, but . . .

I think I mentioned once that I had enlisted the services of a private inquiry agent in my search for my neighbours; and this gentleman had placed at my disposal the abilities of one of his satellites—a man I knew by the name of ‘Pierre.’ He was, I had been led to believe, an ex-member of the staff of the Rue Jerusalem; but the merits which this fact seemed to prove him possessed of, and which I had been assured by the agent were his, had to the present moment brought me little reward. However, Pierre appeared the only weapon to my hand, and I determined to seek him out again and essay what effect a larger bribe than I had as yet made use of might have upon his perceptive faculties.

I had been accustomed to meet the ex-policeman at a café in the neighbourhood of Montmartre, and I strolled there one evening in the hope of coming across him. The lower room of the place was crowded already, though the night was young, with
the usual Montmartre collection of students, artists and models. I saw no sign of the man I was in search of as I strolled down the long, mirror-clad apartment, and, disinclined for the noisy gaiety of the place, I made my way upstairs to a more secluded floor above.

As I seated myself at a table near one of the windows, and gazed out over the busy Place Clichy, above which the gaudy sails of the Moulin Rouge swung noiselessly on their rounds, I noted the crowd of grisettes and ouvrières, employées of the Pauvre St Jacques, the Samaritaire and other great shops, stream past on their homeward journey, and I wondered sadly what Mdllle. Durand was doing at this moment. Had she by any chance descended to this life of the counter and the workshop? Might she not even now be passing me unnoticed in this throng, exposed to the dubious attentions of those men whose inclination seems to lead them, at closing time, into the neighbourhood of the great magasins, or making her way past the critical throng seated at the little tables outside the cafés, alone and unprotected.

I was aroused from my gloomy medita-
tions by a touch on the sleeve, and looking up, I saw the man I had come to meet. Alas! there was no gleam of success in his small twinkling eyes, and my swift-born hope faded suddenly as I motioned him to a seat at my side.

'No news, I presume?' I said resignedly, as, at my request, he helped himself to an 'Amer Picon and Curaçoa'—a drink a trifle stronger than an electric battery—and produced a packet of cigarettes.

'Ah! monsieur,' he said slowly, sipping his liquor rather regretfully, 'I came to-night purposely. I am sorry—a thousand times—but I am no longer free to place my services at your disposal.'

'Oh,' I said, a little surprised, 'I am sorry for that, Pierre, for I intended to make you a better offer. I, too, came here purposely. I am more interested, more determined than ever to find the persons I have mentioned to you.'

'Monsieur, I am more than sorry, I am overwhelmed,' he said politely. 'But,' he continued, with a little touch of pride, 'I am again a servant of the Government.'

'Good gracious! The police?'

'Yes, monsieur, they wanted me back
again; and I was glad to return. I have many friends there.'

'The deuce you have,' I returned.

I looked at the man. He was a small, rather stout, but active, man of forty or so, with a pleasant face, bright, twinkling eyes, and a little imperial which might almost have been a 'goatee.' I should not have supposed him possessed of any great talents, the more so from his failure in my affairs. However, I suppose it pays as well sometimes to be useful as clever, and doubtless Pierre was useful to his Bureau. (It would after all be a bad thing if we were all born clever. There would be no ordinary folk to take warning from our failures and thank the gods they were born stupid.) At anyrate, I felt sure that the man was honest, and his experience could not have failed to be of service to me in any case. I felt as if I had lost a friend, my only one in Paris. Still, if this man was connected with the police, why, I had better bow to the decree of fate.

'Ah, well,' I sighed, 'it can't be helped, I suppose. Thank you for—for what you haven't done for me!'

Pierre laughed. 'I have something more
to say to you yet, Monsieur Carlton,' he said good-naturedly. 'It is true I am no longer free to undertake work outside my department, but monsieur has been so generous! And then it is a young lady monsieur wants to find! Those two things are sufficient to make me stretch a point in monsieur's favour. In my new position I might chance. . . . But let me whisper a secret to monsieur! It may not show much esprit de corps, but the corps is no longer mine! If you will take my advice you will waste no more money with private agencies. They have not the means which we possess of knowing things. We help each other, and what one does not know the other does. I have my spare moments—if monsieur will allow me, I can perhaps return him some value for the money my late worthy employer coaxed from his pockets.'

'Well,' I began rather doubtfully, 'I do not know that . . .'

Pierre interrupted me. 'Don't be afraid, Monsieur Carlton, that your business will be known to anyone but myself. No! no! it will be locked in my own bosom. It will be a matter of confidence and of—of gratitude
between us. That is what I came to say to-night!

I could not help being pleased with the man's feelings; and, as I have said, I felt that he was honest. He could do me little harm, and, as he hinted, might certainly serve me better where he was than he had been able to before. I thanked him and accepted his offer after a moment's thought.

'You will not regret it, monsieur,' he said warmly, as we rose and made our way outside. 'It shall never be said that Pierre Guerin was wanting in gratitude. We have met with much, very much, of that good quality in our family. If monsieur frequents the Abbaye de Thelema (the café we were leaving) I daresay he will often meet me. A word to Joseph downstairs—the chef—will always bring me in twenty-four hours.'

I thanked him again and strolled home, hammering my brains. Where the devil have I heard that name 'Guerin' before?
CHAPTER XIII

‘KISS LIZETTE!’

I recalled next day the occasion of my first meeting with the name of Guerin, and rather smiled to myself as I did so. ‘Guerin’ was the name given in Durand’s letter to the man who had assisted Roger in the false interment at Montrouge. Pierre was certainly not that gentleman, who must have become rather ancient by this time, supposing him to have survived so long. It was hardly probable either—Guerin being a not uncommon name—that my friend Pierre should be a connection of that character in the drama of the Golden Lotus. Nevertheless, it was possible, and though the fact, I fancied, could have but little importance to myself, I determined to question Pierre cautiously when next we should meet.

Guerin did not turn up at the Abbaye de Thelema on the following day, so I left
a message in the evening, as he had requested, with the chef of the establishment, which individual was calmly superintending the frantic efforts of his subordinates to do a hundred things at once, and received my message smilingly, and I strolled out onto the Place Clichy.

As I turned into the Rue Blanche, after a few minutes' walk, a girl who had been walking in front of me staggered, gave a little cry, and reeled back against me. I had noticed her for some distance struggling along under the weight of a large dress-box, and had twice thought of offering my assistance; but my advances might have savoured too much, I thought, of the old ruse of the flâneur, and, pretty as the little figure looked, I was in no mood for adventures.

However, when the little grisette reeled almost into my arms, and her box, dropping from her fingers, fell and burst open, scattering a mass of delicate lingerie on the pavement, I could do no less than catch her round little waist and call on a passer-by to assist in gathering up the contents of the box.

The young girl, still weak and trembling, recovered herself with an effort, but clung
firmly to my arm, regarding ruefully the
delicate trifles, slightly the worse for the
mud of the Paris pavement, which a fat,
good-natured Frenchman was cramming into
the box with a little twinkle in his eye the
while.

He completed his task presently, and
turned with a bow to the girl. 'Voila!
mademoiselle,' he said, 'voila! But made-
moiselle is faint! She still trembles! Either
monsieur or myself must carry the box for
her.' He looked at us with a humorous
glance; and as the grisette still held my
arm his eyes twinkled again. 'Perhaps
monsieur will take it,' he said. 'He is
young, and it would make my arm ache
nowadays—though it would not have done
so once, when . . . .' He stopped and gave a
comical little sigh and a deprecating glance
at his fat waist. I smiled, and a little ripple
of laughter came from my companion as he
passed on. I found myself with the grisette
on one arm and the dress-box on the other
in the Rue Blanche. It was fortunate, I
smiled to myself, that I knew no one in
Paris.

I turned to my new acquaintance. Her
laughter had vanished now, and her pretty
little features were rather dismally drawn and pinched, while her dark eyes had heavy circles under them.

'You are ill?' I said quickly. 'Let me get you a cab! You ought not to have been carrying that heavy box.'

The young girl protested eagerly. She was not ill now! Only a little tired and faint. No! certainly not a cab. She would walk. She could easily walk. Her home was only a little way from there. If monsieur would not mind carrying the box—if it was not too much to ask—she would easily manage the walk.

I judged it better not to insist, and we continued our way down the Rue Blanche.

I endeavoured to keep my companion's thoughts from dwelling too much upon herself and the rumpled lingerie, which I saw was still troubling her mind; and after a question or two I succeeded in getting her to smile at the memory of the good-natured Frenchman, and to chatter a little about her affairs.

I soon gathered that these latter had not been progressing of late. It appeared that she had been for some weeks out of employment, and I guessed that during that time
she had been running the commissariat department rather fine.

And now when she had at last succeeded in getting some work to do at home she had been foolish—foolish! and fainting, she had dropped the lovely things in the mud. There would be terrible trouble about them, she feared.

She stopped at length outside a tall house in a poor quarter of Montmartre and relinquished my arm. I saw, however, that she was not yet too strong on her feet, and as she held out her hand for the box I put it behind my back, smiling.

‘I must carry it upstairs, mademoiselle,’ I said. ‘Remember our other friend entrusted me with it. It is a matter of duty, you see. Quel étage, mademoiselle?’

‘The fifth, monsieur! But you must not, really. I can’t trouble you . . .’

I was firm, however. The real truth was (I hope I shall not be doubted) that I wanted a chance of surreptitiously hiding a little bank-note somewhere, for my companion’s pale little face and doleful looks had touched my sympathies.

‘But, monsieur, what will my friend say? I have a friend, and—I—’
'KISS LIZETTE!'  

'Oh! a friend!' I said a little dryly. 'Then perhaps I had better not come up.'

The little grisette flushed quickly at my tone. 'My friend is a young lady, monsieur,' she said eagerly. 'It is not that—not what monsieur thought, but she is—'

'Very particular? Very well! we will explain to her how we met, and how a very respectable, middle-aged gentleman entrusted me with you and your box,' I said gaily. 'And then I will go away and we will never meet again. Montons!'

And we mounted.

The little grisette opened a door on the fifth étage, and entering, called, 'Mademoiselle!'

There came no reply, and she turned to me with a surprised look. 'Mademoiselle is out,' she said.

'She will be long?'

'Oh, no, monsieur! I suppose that she has just run downstairs to get something or other. She hardly ever goes out. She will certainly not be long.'

'Very well, we will wait for her, then,' I returned calmly.

My companion looked at me dubiously. Suddenly from within came the sound of a
harsh, low voice that seemed to growl at us.

I started back, and my new acquaintance gave a little pleased laugh. 'It is Cocca!' she said. 'Do you hear him? He says, "Bon jour" and "Bon soir" and "Comment ça va," and ever so much. Oh, you would laugh to hear him talk.'

'A parrot?'

'But yes, monsieur. Oh, such a magnificent bird! I have been offered money for him—a lot of money; but I would starve rather than sell Cocca.'

Her voice trembled a little, and I remembered her troubles. 'May I see him?' I asked.

She had forgotten her doubts of me in her excitement about the parrot, and we entered the little sitting-room, where Cocca, in a gilded pagoda, looked slightly out of touch with his surroundings.

'Lizette! Lizette!' cried the bird, a fine grey parrot possessing a demure eye.

'Your name is Lizette?' I asked, when I sufficiently examined her pet.

'Yes, monsieur, Lizette! But you must hear him talk English. Cocca! Cocca! Talk English.'
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'English?' I exclaimed. 'What an accomplished bird.'

Cocca eyed us solemnly. 'Kiss Lizette! Kiss Lizette!' he murmured.

I laughed. Lizette blushed. 'Ah, he knows other things than that,' she said hastily.

'But it is good advice,' I returned. We both laughed, and in a moment we were the best of friends.

'Lizette,' I said, 'I have an idea. I am hungry. You say your friend will be back soon. I saw a particularly good charcuterie in the street below. I am a lonely garçon. Let me bring my supper here. By the time I get back your friend will have returned, and it will all be quite proper.'

I noticed that Lizette's features involuntarily brightened, even while she frowned; and without waiting for a reply I hurried out and made my way to the shop which I had mentioned.

When I had loaded myself with a bottle of Grave and as much pâté de foie gras and other eatables as I could carry, I made my way back again quickly.

The concierge looked at me suspiciously,
but I hurried on. The door of the apartment on the fifth étage stood open, and with a little knock I entered.

As I did so, a tall figure rose from a chair and faced me, and I staggered back, nearly dropping my parcels.

It was my turn to blush now, and I did it thoroughly, standing with my arms full of comestibles, and staring confusedly at the beautiful girl who faced me, for it was Mdlle. Durand.

Desperately inclined to turn and bolt, I felt wildly that there was hardly anyone I would not rather have met under the circumstances. Yet I had found her at last.

When I had recovered my scattered senses I saw that Mdlle. Durand was looking as startled as myself, and I pulled myself together.

‘I beg your pardon,’ I said hastily. ‘The door was open . . . Mdlle. Lizette . . . ahem. . . .’

I saw the little smile on her lips, and I determined to have my revenge for it later on. At present I was in the wrong position.

‘Perhaps Mdlle. Lizette has explained to you how we became acquainted?’ I said stiffly.
'Lizette has told me that a gentleman had assisted her,' she returned. 'Poor little thing! She has overdone it lately. But, Mr Carlton,' she continued, a little maliciously, 'you seem destined to assist ladies in distress.'

I noticed, however, that she was looking very pale herself, and that her beautiful eyes were haggard.

'I hope she did not give me a very enterprising character,' I said. 'The truth is—well—I was hungry, and I thought . . .'

Fortunately, at this moment, Lizette entered and gave a little involuntary gasp of delight at the sight of my packages. I put them down on the table and stood for a moment irresolute.

'But you know one another!' cried Lizette, astonished, glancing from Mdlle. Durand to me.

I looked at Madeleine. She did not smile, and I fancied I saw a little frown on her face.

I stepped forward. 'Mdlle. Durand! You left a note for me with the concierge of my room. But I never received it. It . . . it was lost somehow . . .'

She looked up in surprise, but I fancied I
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

saw her face change slightly. 'The concierge
lost it,' I continued. 'I was excessively
annoyed—more than I can say. I did all I
possibly could to find you and explain—but
it was of no avail. You must know I would
have given anything rather than it should
happen.'

She smiled a little at the eagerness of my
tone, and turned away with a blush to Liz-
ette. 'Yes, Mr Carlton and I are acquaint-
ances, Lizette,' she said. 'Mr Carlton, this is
Madame Perpol's niece. Lizette, Mr Carlton
was my neighbour in the Rue Tronchet.'

'Madame Perpol is not with you, then?'
I asked.

'She was obliged to leave to go to the
bedside of her daughter, who is ill in
Brittany. She left me, however, in the
charge of Lizette here. Poor Lizette! She
has worried herself too much about me,
and that is the cause of your strange meet-
ing just now, and of the . . . the invita-
tion to supper.'

'The invitation?' I said quickly, pretend-
ing to misunderstand; 'then I am invited?'

Lizette looked at Mdille. Durand, and
back again to the parcels, with a comical
little air.
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'I think the invitation should not come from us, Mr Carlton,' said Mdlle. Durand, with a smile. 'These packages are not ours.'

'But you can cook them for me?' I said eagerly. 'I assure you some of them need cooking.' To save further objections I rapidly untied the string of one of the parcels. 'Can you cook, Lizette?' I said anxiously.

Lizette's eyes sparkled with excitement. She was better now. She gathered up the pâté de foie gras and the quails with feverish hands. 'Ah, monsieur, you shall see if I cannot cook!' she said, and she disappeared into the inner room.

I turned to Mdlle. Durand quickly. 'I read the letter which you so generously trusted me with,' I said. 'What can I do for you?'

She sighed. 'There is nothing you can do, Mr Carlton, nothing! I gave you my brother's letter that night when . . . when you returned me my ring, because you might have thought . . . I didn't want you to think . . . I wished you to understand! But there is nothing to do now—you can see yourself—there is nothing. It is all
hopeless. Oh, my poor brother!—poor Lancelot! I fancied that with help I might have done something to save him. I see now that it is impossible—was always impossible.'

She was much agitated as she spoke, and as I saw how the past few weeks had taken the exquisite colour from her cheeks, and traced dark lines under her lovely eyes, I tortured my brains for some words of comfort. Yet I felt that there was little of comfort that I could say.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'but I fancy your brother is still safe. I imagine that this man Clay, or "Denver" must be aware by this time of the hiding-place of the thing these people are seeking. I think that fact is almost certain; and in that case, why should they persecute your brother?'

'But how is it that Lancelot—that he is not here, while that horrible man is? My brother imagined that he would follow him to Jamaica.'

So she had followed out the same train of argument as I had! I fear she read my face, for she trembled as she spoke, and for a second I thought she would break down. Her courage, however,
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upheld her. 'Oh, it is all too terrible!—too terrible!' she cried wildly, but keeping back
the tears that would rise in spite of herself
to her dark eyes. 'I feel as if I had failed
him at the hour of his need—as if I ought to
have saved him—to save him still! But
what can I do, Mr Carlton? Ah! don't
think me ungrateful for your offers of friend-
ship at a time when—when I have so few
friends, but indeed I hardly know whether I
ought ever to have given you that letter
of Lancelot's! Perhaps he . . .'

I interrupted her eagerly. 'He told you
in the letter to obtain assistance,' I said. (I
did not mention that he particularly warned
her against new acquaintances.) 'It was
impossible that you could have done what
he asked of you alone—or even with only
your maid to help you.'

In spite of her courage Mdle. Durand
shuddered and turned pale. 'Ah! that
night! that dreadful night! I shall never
forget it. The loneliness of the place—the
fear! Then we got parted, Marie and I.
We had to separate—we fancied we were
pursued—and I lost my way. I thought I
should never reach my home—I was terri-
fied, and I felt as if I had been committing

M
some frightful crime. Ah! I dream of that night still!'

'Indeed, your courage must have been wonderful to have attempted the task at all,' I said pityingly. 'How could any man'... I stopped. It would not do to tell her my opinion of Lancelot Durand.

However, for the second time that night Mdlle. Durand seemed to read my thoughts. 'Poor Lancelot!' she murmured. 'Think of his trouble—his danger! He knew I would help him if I could! Oh, Heaven grant that he may yet be safe!'

'You must indeed trust in Heaven,' I said. 'But remember what I have said. You have now a friend, a very firm friend, believe me. I will give my whole time—fortunately I am free and can do so—to doing all in my power to help you. I would give my life to aid you. But forgive me! You look pale and ill, and your poor little friend too! Is there nothing I can do for you? Are you sure this life—this place suits you? I hope to meet your brother yet, can't I... won't you let me...' I stammered under her gaze and stopped weakly.

'I shall be grateful—very grateful, for
your friendship, Mr Carlton,' said Mdlle. Durand, lowering her eyes, and then raising them again a little haughtily, 'but there is nothing you can do, thank you. I hope... we hope to get some work shortly, and I am used to earning my own living I assure you.'

I was silent. I thought of the little grisette in the next room, her eyes sparkling over her cooking, and my gaze turned involuntarily towards this lovely, well-bred girl whom fate had made her companion—her fellow-worker. Lizette, no doubt, was a dear little thing—but she could hardly be a fit companion for Mdlle. Durand, or this life a suitable one.

'Lizette is so good!' Mdlle. Durand continued, smiling as the sound of the girl's singing reached us from the inner room. 'She works so hard. I believe she would not allow me to do anything at all if she could help it. As it is, I fear her breaking down.'

'You have known her long?' I asked.

'Oh, yes, her mother was the lodge-keeper at a place my mother had in Brittany. Her aunt, too, whom I think you spoke to first on the stairs, was with us for many years. They have been so kind, so faithful, when there was no reward to gain.'
I thought that they had gained a reward which I would give much to win, but I only nodded; and at that moment Lizette entering with the supper, we seated ourselves at the little round table and commenced to put aside our various troubles under the influence of Lizette's never long-repressed gaiety.

It was very easy to see that the little grisette adored her young mistress-companion, and she showed it in every word she spoke to her. But there was none of the awkwardness an English girl in her position would have shown under the circumstances. Indeed, there never is that kind of awkwardness among the French or Italian lower classes. They can laugh or chatter to their superiors in station with as much freedom as they would use to their equals; and without ever crossing the line, whose presence thus becomes forgotten. Lizette, too, was a thorough little Parisienne, and when one has said that one has said (as even an Englishman must confess) 'tout!'

Certainly she made our little supper a success, and as Mdlle. Durand, with all her anxiety and grief, was still only, after all (whatever my opinions of her might be),
human and young, we were soon all three laughing and chattering almost gaily.

There was only one little contretemps that arrived to cloud for a moment my own personal enjoyment. The parrot was the cause of it. For once a sudden hoarse murmur of ‘Kiss Lizette!’ brought the blood to my cheek, and a little malicious laugh from Mdlle. Lizette made me tremble and glance hurriedly towards Mdlle. Durand. Fortunately she happened not to be looking at me, and a quick, imploring gesture brought me back a little laughing nod of understanding from Lizette. After all, as I watched her little smiling red lips, I could not blame myself about that ‘good advice.’ But my heart was now on serious business bent, and I could not but feel grateful for that little nod, which seemed to express both comprehension and laughing secrecy at the same time.
CHAPTER XIV

PIERRE GUERIN

PIERRE GUERIN kept his word to me the next evening, and I had not been long seated in the upper room of the Abbaye de Thelema when he approached and took a chair by me.

'I have news for you to-night, monsieur,' he said, when he had ordered his favourite 'Picon et Curaçoa' and settled himself at his ease.

'Indeed,' I replied rather carelessly, 'what may it be?'

'I have found the young lady monsieur was in search of,' he said, with a little touch of triumph. 'One of my confrères happened to be working a case in the very district where mademoiselle now lives.'

'Ah, Montmartre?' I said carelessly.

Pierre started and looked at me for a moment. Then he gave a comical little
PIERRE GUERIN

shrug of the shoulders, 'I see I am rather late with my news,' he said with resignation. 'But if I had only returned to my old confrères a week sooner . . .'

'Oh, it was chance—the merest chance—that enabled me to beat you by a day,' I said.

Pierre gave a sigh of relief. 'Thank you, monsieur. Then my professional pride is untouched?'

'It can be so, quite,' I replied, smiling. 'I am much obliged to you for your efforts, which accident robbed of their just reward.'

'You see, Monsieur Carlton,' Pierre went on, 'there were difficulties which perhaps you do not realise in the way of the search. For instance, you did not tell me the young lady was French!'

'Well, no, I suppose I did not. She is of a French mother and an English father. It was perhaps my fault that you did not understand. I have always looked upon her as more English than French.'

'And there were two women I was to look for. There is only one left—or rather, one of them is not the original woman whom you described to me.'

'That is true, too. Mademoiselle's maid
left her for a time. But tell me—you appear to know as much as I do; perhaps you know even more—can you tell me anything of . . . I fear mademoiselle is not very rich at present. Have you any idea how they have been living?'

'Living? Ah, monsieur, for a friend of monsieur's, not too well, I fear! La petite was for a time employée at the Maison Pauvre Jacques. She used to take home outside work as well, which mademoiselle did. But then a slack time came and the newcomers of course were discharged first. How they lived afterwards I do not know, but it must have been a hard life for a young lady well brought up!'

I sighed as I remembered Mdlle. Durand's pale, sad face.

Suddenly Pierre moved his chair nearer to mine and bent towards me across the table. 'Are you aware, monsieur,' he asked me in a low voice, 'that others besides you are interested in mademoiselle?'

I started and turned pale. For a second I mistook his meaning.

'Someone is shadowing mademoiselle,' he continued, 'so my colleague tells me. You see we are quick to notice anything of that
kind—we can always tell; although, of course, my confrère did not give much attention to the fact. He merely noted it in order to warn me.'

I was silent, thinking deeply. It must be Clay who was watching Mdle. Durand still. I did not think, however, that he could harm her now. Should I say anything about him to Guerin?

'Have I told you anything you wished to know, monsieur?' asked Pierre, a little anxiously.

'Yes, certainly,' I returned. 'I am glad to hear what you have told me.'

'You have relieved my mind, monsieur! I am glad that I have been of some, however slight, service to you. You were very generous to me, monsieur, on our first acquaintance; and it would be strange, indeed, if I, Pierre Guerin, should ever give anyone cause to say I was not grateful.'

This was the second occasion on which the detective had used these or similar words, and I could not help inquiring what particular meaning underlay them.

'Would monsieur care to hear the story?' asked Pierre. 'Well, I do not know why I should not tell it. Let me see!' Has
monsieur heard—but of course you have not
—of the Montrouje affair?'

I jumped. 'Good Lord! what affair?' I
cried. For a moment my mind flew to the
Golden Lotus and its story.

I attempted to disguise my momentary
emotion, but Pierre's eyes were trained to
speedy deduction, and he did not miss my
start. 'You have heard of it, I see,
monsieur! You appear destined to-night to
know beforehand all that I would tell you!
It is rather disconcerting for one of my pro-
fession. But perhaps, monsieur, you can
tell me then who it was attempted—if it were
really an attempt—to open that grave in
Montrouje, and what their object was. I
shall be exceedingly obliged if you can, for I
can see nothing in it all myself. And yet I
should be able to, if anyone, for I helped to
dig that grave.'

'You helped to dig it?' I cried.

'As a boy, monsieur, yes, I may say so,
for I carried the spade for my father and sat
and watched him, on the grass by his side.
But, monsieur, what can you know about all
this?' asked Pierre, fixing his little sharp
eyes on me.

'To tell you the truth, I read the para-
graphs about the affair in the papers at the time,' I said carelessly, 'and it struck me as so queer that an attempt should be made on this apparently long-forgotten grave that I have often thought about it since. Have you any particular theory about it?'

My explanation fortunately appeared to satisfy Pierre. 'Excuse me, monsieur, it would hardly be my duty to tell you if I had a theory,' he said quietly, 'but, to be frank with you, I have none, except that there is nothing in it.'

'I daresay you are right,' I returned quietly. 'I have often thought the same. It was only some student's lark! or perhaps merely an attempt to draw attention from some genuine affair elsewhere. But tell me! you say you helped your father dig the grave?'

'My uncle,' corrected Pierre, rapidly. 'I said my uncle, monsieur. It is a strange tale; but as everyone but myself who was ever connected with it is dead, I don't see why I should not tell it to you. I cannot explain what monsieur wanted me to explain without telling this story.

'My uncle—it was my uncle, monsieur—was once a guardian of the cemetery of
Montrouge. He was a respectable man, and much respected in addition; but he had a sad domestic life. Ah! it was cruel, monsieur, and when at last his wife died—though it is sad to have to say it—the event was a happy release, not only for him, but for his neighbours as well. For the rest of his life he remained a misogynist, and lived alone with me, his only son. (I passed over in silence the fact of Pierre being his uncle's only son.) His wife had had English relations, and a distant cousin of these connections came one day to live with us. He was, of course, in reality no relation of ours, but my uncle took to him, because Roger—his name was Roger too—was unhappily married. Oh! in his case it was terrible, monsieur. I used to sit and shudder at the tales he told of this woman. They were terrific! Well, for that reason he was welcome with us, and perhaps also because my uncle felt rather lonely now that his life was so peaceful.

‘Well, it appeared that the time came at last when Roger could no longer support the tie which bound him to his wife. I fancy—though the subject was only hinted at in my youthful presence—that a young lady had
appeared on the scene who was not terrible; and it was arranged that Roger should disappear.

'It was quite evident to my uncle, who had listened to the tales Roger told of Madame Roger, and who remembered his own wedded life, that complete security from her could only be found in one spot—the grave. It was decided to bury Roger.'

'You mean a false interment?' I asked.

'Precisely, monsieur. It appeared that the fraud could harm no one—not even Madame Roger, who, it appeared, would be left well off, having money of her own. As indeed she must have had, or he would never have married such a woman! Roger's life was not insured, and altogether my uncle concluded that the sin which he was committing would sit lightly on his conscience. Perhaps monsieur has never been married?'

'I have not,' I replied, laughing.

'Ah, well, it does not matter. Roger and my uncle had; and they will be forgiven when their sufferings are known in heaven. So, monsieur, Roger one day fell very ill and we dug his grave. And the very day he left Paris for ever we buried him. That was appropriate, eh, monsieur? On the
day when I leave Paris for ever I would wish to be buried too!

'I did not know at the time the real truth of the case; I was too young, and I wept for Roger. It was only on his death-bed that my uncle confided the secret to me. And, if you will believe me, monsieur, it was all he did confide to me on that occasion. Ah! he was a heartless man, my uncle! Perhaps his domestic misfortunes had made him so. While he lived he spent all his money—all! all! And I verily believe that he had timed his expenditure so carefully that when he gave me a five-franc piece to buy him a bottle of cognac with on the day of his death it was the last he had in the world. Ah! yes, monsieur, he was a hard man! With the callousness of the hen or the cow, whose parental affection seems to vanish on the day that the chicken or the calf becomes able to get its own living, he died and left me penniless!

'I was fourteen years old, monsieur, and for three days I sat in our empty house (the bailiffs took the furniture after the funeral) and wondered what on earth was to become of me. Many a time during those three days I wished myself in poor Roger's grave.
On the fourth morning there came a letter to my uncle from a far-off country. I opened it, monsieur. Could you believe it—it contained a draft for nearly £500. It was a token of gratitude to my uncle from Roger on his death-bed—his real death-bed this time. A little note, which I have ever guarded, said that the writer was dying but that he had not forgotten—could never forget—my uncle’s kindness and help, and that he had left him all he had in the world in the way of money.

‘Well, I was my uncle’s heir, and I got the money. From a starving boy I became wealthy. My neighbours were glad to care for me now, and in time I became what you now see me. Had it not been for Roger what might I not have become?

‘Yes, monsieur, all that I am and have I owe to poor Roger. It may not be much, but it is all to me. And now you understand why it is that, in honour of this brave Englishman’s memory, Pierre Guerin would rather die than ever show ingratitude, even for the smallest kindness. And now you understand why I believe that there can be nothing in this Montrouje affair. For the grave was the grave of the Englishman Roger. But it is strange that I am the one to be
placed in charge of the affair, is it not?'

'You are placed in charge of the affair?'

'Yes. But it is only a nominal charge after all. Nevertheless, the authorities have judged it best to keep a certain amount of guard over that part of the cemetery, in case that, as you suggested, the attempt might have been a cloak for some other genuine business.'

Pierre's disclosures were certainly rather startling, but nevertheless it appeared to me that, as far as they went, they were all good. Evidently nothing of the real truth was suspected by the authorities; and Pierre, who had charge of the affair, seemed to attach little importance to it. In that case Mdlle. Durand's expedition was safe from detection. The fact that the cemetery was still watched would of course make the recovery of the Golden Lotus difficult; but then that would hit this man Denver too. How strange that Pierre should be thus even remotely connected with that romance of Durand's! His uncle?

'Was this uncle your father's brother?'
I asked Pierre.
PIERRE GUERIN

'No, monsieur, my—my mother's,' he replied.
'And his name was, you said—?'
Pierre hesitated. 'Henrot,' he responded, after a moment's thought.
I smiled to myself. My friend Pierre had evidently sufficient filial affection left, in spite of his story, to substitute his 'uncle' for his father. For 'Guerin' had been the name mentioned in Durand's letter.
I sat silent for some time, thinking, while the strains of the string band below floated up to us and Pierre smoked his cigarette.
'Pierre,' I said by-and-by, 'supposing that this benefactor of yours—Roger, I think you said his name was—had left—had made known certain wishes before he died—supposing it could be proved to you that he had, would you assist in carrying them out if it ever were in your power to do so?'
'Ah! Monsieur Carlton, can you ask it? But he left no other instructions. His letter to my uncle only contained what I have told you. But can monsieur doubt that I would? One does not receive £500 every day.'
I made a mental note of his words, and rose as if our conversation was at an end.
'If I were to need your services I can
call you in the same way, I presume?’ I asked as we went downstairs.

‘Certainly, monsieur; Joseph will let you know. He is a neighbour of mine, and I see him every morning.’

I thanked him, and returned to my home with a vague idea taking shape in my mind—an idea, it is needless to say, of a method by which I might assist Madeleine Durand, for her beauty and misfortunes held sole sway over my thoughts.
CHAPTER XV

MDLLE. DURAND'S BROTHER

One evening, soon after my conversation with Pierre Guerin, I was seated in my rooms, now so lonely for me without my neighbour, when I fancied I heard someone stumbling about in the passage outside. I was about to rise and bolt my door, for I had just come in from a long walk and did not feel inclined to be disturbed, when a terrific thumping arose above the silence of the night, and I could hear a voice vociferating loudly below.

I rose and went to listen; and as I did so I recollected that on entering the house a few minutes before I had caught a few words of an excited conversation in progress in my concierge's lodge. It had appeared to me at the time that some big man whose back, stopping up the entrance to the lodge, was turned to me, was trying to impress
something on the deaf old janitor which that worthy did not seem able to grasp.

I had discreetly avoided any chance of being drawn into the discussion, although I had certainly fancied that the big man's voice was reminiscent of my native land.

However, here the man was, evidently, on my landing, and I was about to admit him unwillingly, when I remarked, to my amazement, that the newcomer was hammering vigorously at the apartment of my neighbours and calling out for 'Madeleine!'

The next moment the noise commenced on my own door, and, to save the panels, I flung it wide open.

A huge, furious and red-headed man faced me impetuously. 'Mdlle. Durand's?' he queried eagerly. Then, 'Pooh! of course not! she wouldn't keep a man in the house. It must be the other door after all!' He was turning away irresolutely, as if meditating another assault on my neighbour's apartment, when I stopped him.

While he spoke I had been thinking rapidly. 'A big man, red-haired, thick neck, an Anglo-Indian (to say the least of it) temper.' Why, then, who was this?
MDLLE. DURAND'S BROTHER

'Excuse me,' I said quickly, 'are you looking for the lady who lived in that apartment—Mdlle. Durand?'

'Thank God you are English!' came fervently back. 'My French, though I was brought up here, is rusty or something. I couldn't make that old fool of a concierge understand me.'

'He is deaf,' I said.

'Oh, deaf, is he? the old fool! Yes, thanks, I am looking for my sister. What of her? Do you know her? Why isn't she here?'

'She has left here,' I said. 'Do you mind coming inside? I will tell you all I know.'

The big man looked at me in surprise for a moment, and then, nodding his head, walked into my rooms.

I pulled out a chair for him and pretended to be busy with the outer door while I recovered my wits. I am rather cool-headed on occasions, but I was feeling considerably flustered at the moment. Madeleine's brother here, alive and well! Expecting to find her here too! . . . It was certainly all rather staggering.

I followed him into my room and took a
seat facing him. 'Will you have a whisky and soda?' I asked.

'Er—er—you are very hospitable, Mr. . . . ?'

'Mr Carlton.'

'Mr Carlton. Yes, thanks, if you have any at hand, I will. But my sister—?'

'You had better have the whisky and soda first,' I said quietly. 'You will need it.'

The big man gasped and swung round in his chair to face me. 'Good God, man! don't say she is dead!' he cried.

'Oh, no, Mdlle Durand is well, but . . . '

'But what? Well, man! Why the devil don't you speak out? Forgive me—forgive me! but you keep me waiting in such a way that . . . I may tell you, Mr Carlton, that I have come several thousand miles—from Colombo, in fact—to see my sister. My business is most important. . . . Thank you!' (I had given him the whisky) 'and you . . . you . . . '

'The truth is I was wondering how the deuce to begin,' I said, staring at him. 'What I have to say to you is so extra-ordinary that. . . . First of all, I had the pleasure of meeting your sister, and of seeing
her several times, while she lived here. She left one morning some weeks ago . . . unavoidably . . .

'What? Money?'
'I fancy so.'
'Good Lord! what a fool I was! I ought to have sent her some! She had something to do for me.'
'She failed in that,' I said involuntarily.

Mr Durand started violently, and for a moment I thought he was going to rush at me. Instead, he sprang to the door and put his back against it.
'Tell me what you know!' he said. 'You are not one of them surely?'
'Everything — and I am not one of them!'
'Everything?'
'Yes.'

Durand returned to his chair and flung himself into it, looking at me dubiously.
'She has failed? She told you?' he stammered.
'She gave me your letter,' I returned calmly. 'It was, I think, the best thing she could have done. She was helpless—she had tried and failed—she was in danger—and she had no money and practically no
friends. I was a new acquaintance, it is true, but there were reasons . . . I had reason to think she was in danger, and I practically forced the confidence upon her. You will understand, Mr Durand, of course, that it was a confidence.'

Mr Durand's face was expressing a variety of emotions at the moment, but I fancied he had the grace to appear a little confused at my tone.

'For a rather recent acquaintance, doesn't it strike you that you have me slightly under the whip?' he said at length. 'But you say you had reason to think my sister in danger. What do you mean?

I rose, and opening the door of the memorable cupboard, drew his attention to the little row of pegs which showed very plainly from this side. 'I put those in,' I said. 'When I first took these rooms I noticed that the wall into the next apartment was pierced. The man who had the chambers before me—he had not long occupied them—must have found it necessary to spy upon Mdlle. Durand, and made use of that means.'

'Phew! Clay!' whistled Durand.

'Denver he calls himself now. I have
not the slightest doubt, however, that he is your "Clay."

'He is up to any devilry,' said Durand, musingly. 'He must have come straight on here. My little plan didn't work. By his being here—which, by the way, I expected—he must have rather tumbled to things. They put another man on to watch me. My God! man,' he continued, with a burst of passion, 'they have driven me wild—wild! You can't imagine! The devils! But they don't know me yet. I fancy I have left one of them sorry for himself over there in Jamaica already! I'm a bad-tempered man—always have been—but I'm quiet as a rule. These men have drawn me! I tell you, man, I'm out of myself! I'm... I'm...'

He sank back into his chair and I rushed to open the window. I saw that his face was purple and the veins in his forehead were standing out distended and bursting. When I had unfastened the windows he had recovered a little and was lying back, blowing out his cheeks, and with his collar and waistcoat unbuttoned.

'That's the devil of it!' he said hurriedly. 'Excuse me—apoplectic, you know! This will happen once too often. I used to care.
I don’t now. Let me once get the chance I am after and use it—use it!’

‘Feel better?’ I asked.

‘Yes, better now. I must be careful, though. Where’s Madeleine?’

I gave him the address and he rose slowly, allowing his great weight to rest gradually on his still trembling legs. When he was upright he shook himself like a great Newfoundland dog and cast a rueful grin at me.

‘I fancy a walk and a little fresh air will do me good,’ he said, taking up his hat. ‘Can I see you in the morning? I think we had better have a yarn when I have seen Madeleine.’

‘Certainly. I will remain at home. Excuse me, perhaps you had better ask to see Mdlle. Lizette first. Your sister has been very anxious about you, and the shock might be rather sudden for her.’

He nodded. ‘Any chance of Clay being about to-night?’ he asked shortly.

‘Here? No! I think not. But... by the way, he certainly might be about there.’

‘If he only would be! But it doesn’t matter—we shall meet soon enough! He will have heard of my arrival. Trust them for that, though I came quietly enough.’
MDLLE. DURAND'S BROTHER

I remembered his 'quiet' arrival, and, like the parrot, I thought a good deal.

At the door Durand turned and held out his hand to me. 'Good night, Mr Carlton, and thank you,' he said. 'If you don't mind shaking hands with me. Lord knows, what you have heard of me isn't a very good introduction, is it? Never mind! Moriturus te salutat, you know. I fancy my life's a pretty shaky one.'

I took the proffered hand, and the grip it gave my fingers made me think — rather irrelevantly at first sight — of Denver's throat.

Then he was gone, and my rooms, when I returned to them without his presence, seemed to have the silence and emptiness of primitive space.

What was going to happen? That was my first thought. Madeleine's brother in Paris — on his way now to see her! That would alter my plans in many ways. And first of all came the thought that there were no more happy evenings in store for me at the little rooms in Montmartre. And what happy evenings they had been! For I had returned several times since that first night when chance had made me Lizette's rescuer;
and on each occasion it had seemed to me that Madeleine Durand had greeted me kindly and appeared pleased at my coming. I would sit and attempt to amuse the two companions with tales of my colonial adventures—which seemed especially strange, I daresay, to Lizette, a Parisienne of Parisiennes—or listen to the little grizette's gay voice trilling out quaint Brittany folk-songs, while Madeleine sat sewing, her sad young face brightening now and then as my talk or Lizette's gaiety made us smile.

How wildly I longed in those brief days for some miracle that should chase from Mdlle. Durand's mind the memory of the Golden Lotus and its tale of tragedies, and leave us to live our lives free from that dark shadow. Often, indeed, the impulse had come over me, almost irresistibly, to fling myself at Madeleine's feet, and telling her all the love I felt rising, rising to my lips, implore her to let me take her away from Paris, from all memory of that night of terror, from all the misery and trouble that overhung her.

But I dared not. Kind she always was, and sometimes I fancied her lovely proud young face softened as her eyes met mine,
still I knew that as yet I was only a friend to her, and that thoughts of other feelings would never touch—or be allowed to touch—her heart while the shadow of her brother's danger yet rested on her.

And so I had set myself to think how that shadow might be removed; and even while I planned, Durand's arrival came to shatter my hopes. His three months must have expired, or nearly so; his appointed task was not accomplished; his presence must be shortly known to the men in whose power he was. Would they spare him? He had attempted to trick them. It was not likely. In addition—from what I had seen of the man—I judged him to be bent on a scheme of his own contriving, and hardly in a state to be turned aside by the arguments of a stranger such as I was. That scheme must be a dangerous one, and he was a desperate man. Certainly Durand's arrival had brought the bubbles to the surface with a vengeance.
CHAPTER XVI

THE GARDENS OF THE TUILERIES

Durand had expressed his intention of returning to interview me when he should have seen his sister, and with that promise in view I had remained in my rooms awaiting him.

I was, therefore, considerably surprised when my concierge's wife, knocking at my door on the following morning, informed me that Mdlle. Durand was downstairs and wished a moment's conversation with me. 'Ah, the poor ma'amzelle!' sighed the old lady, 'she looks ill and sad since she left here.'

'Mademoiselle is waiting downstairs to see me?' I said, surprised.

'Yes, monsieur. You would not have the young lady come upstairs to pay a visit to a bachelor. Mademoiselle is comme-il-faut! But she wishes to see you, doubtless on im-
portant affairs, and she awaits you in the hall.'

I hurried down to meet my visitor. Madeleine Durand here—alone and without her brother! What had happened, then?

Mdle. Durand was standing in the doorway. A hurried glance at her beautiful face assured me that, although she was looking anxious and ill, there was no pressing disaster to report.

'Good morning, Mr Carlton,' she murmured, as I took her hand. 'Will you forgive me for troubling you?'

'You know I am always ready to serve you, Mdle. Durand,' I protested eagerly. 'You need not be afraid of troubling me. The question is, what can I do to help you? You have seen your brother?'

'Yes—oh, yes, and he is safe, as you said he would be. I cannot express to you how relieved I feel to think that he is here, and that at least he will be near us should anything happen!'

Her tone made me glance at her. 'Have you reason to fear that there is any new danger?' I asked anxiously.

She gave a hurried glance round her, and I guessed that she still felt scarcely secure in
that house where she had known so much anxiety.

' I have to go to Galignani's,' I said. 'Have you anything to do? or can we walk that way together? It might be better, if you have something to tell me, to hold our conversation in the open streets.'

She consented, and we strolled together down the Rue Basse Rampart.

'My brother tells me that he took you by surprise last night,' said Mdlle. Durand, after we had reached the broader pavements of the Rue Royale, and were able to converse without bumping against our fellow-passengers.

' I assure you, after the first awkwardness of explaining things had passed, I was very glad to see him,' I said. ' I felt how pleased you would be to know he was safe.'

' I feared that Lancelot might be angry with me—forgive me, Mr Carlton—for giving you his letter at that time when I was so hopeless. I am so pleased that he is not. I think he trusts you, Mr Carlton, as . . .' She stopped with a little smile.

'Say as you do!' I said eagerly.

'Did I not give you the letter?' she replied simply.

'You did, Mdlle. Durand, and I can never
thank you enough for your trust in me. I only blame myself for having done so little to help you thus far. But if you will only have patience with me a little longer, I have a plan, and I think I can promise to save your brother, unless—unless . . .’

‘Ah! Mr Carlton, you are too kind—but how can we accept your help—how can we drag you into this terrible affair which seems so hopeless, so dangerous?’

‘The means I had thought of would not be dangerous,’ I said quietly, ‘and I fancy they would be effective in preserving your brother from immediate and pressing danger at least. But I hesitated just now because . . .’

We had reached the end of the Rue Royale by this time and turned down the Rue de Rivoli. On our left were the Gardens of the Tuileries. It was a dull autumn morning, slightly misty, and as I glanced through the high railings into the gardens below I saw that they were almost deserted.

‘You will be tired, Mdlle. Durand,’ I said, ‘if you have already walked from Montmartre this morning. Shall we enter the gardens? See, there is a seat over there, and at least we shall be certain of not being overheard.’
She nodded, and we made our way to the little seat under the leafless chestnuts. The dull, cold day had cleared the gardens of even the children and nursemaids who usually frequent the spot, and save for a solitary pedestrian or two making their way to the Louvre Galleries we were alone.

How I blessed the thought which had brought us there that morning—how I have blessed it since. The chestnuts have had many a gayer coat since that day, and many a brighter sun has shone on Madeleine and myself seated there on that same seat under their shade, but somehow I fancy I have never appreciated the Gardens of the Tuileries as I did on that occasion.

'Ve the reason I hesitated just now was because I feared that your brother himself might prevent my assisting him,' I said, when we were at last seated. 'I fear he has some scheme in his mind which may ...'

Mdle. Durand interrupted me. 'Ah, yes, Mr Carlton, you are right! That is my reason for venturing to come to you this morning. Lancelot has some idea—some thought of braving these dreadful men. He seems—I do not quite know how to express it—to have been driven almost beyond reason.
THE GARDENS OF THE TUILERIES

He will not listen to me, and attempting to see that dreadful man, Doctor Clay, make some terms with him. He is determined to, as he says, be revenged on him, and that, too, by getting possession of that horrible jewel which has brought about all this unhappiness. Oh, it is madness to try again, I know! It must all end fatally. These men—these secret, terrible enemies—will never allow him to retain the object for which they have already sacrificed so much to win. And then the police! What will they do? It is impossible to hope that they would not trace the authors of a second attempt.

'Indeed, I know that the grave in Montrouge is still watched,' I said, 'although I am happy to tell you that the authorities give, I fancy, small importance to the last—to your—expedition.'

Mdlle. Durand shuddered. 'I have not been thinking much about myself,' she said sadly, 'but of course I always feared that there might be danger. But tell me, Mr Carlton, do you think they would allow us to keep the Golden Lotus if they knew?'

'It is difficult to say,' I replied. 'I am utterly ignorant of the law on such a subject as that; but I am quite sure it would never
do to take the law into our confidence. The publicity which would be inevitable in such a romantic case would'—I hesitated—'would be fatal to your brother's success.'

Madeleine sighed. 'And yet I am sure he means to risk all this! Oh! I must tell you, Mr Carlton! Lancelot was not very well this morning—he was tired after his journey, and he is not in good health—or he would have come to you. But he means to see you to-day. Mr Carlton, will you promise me something—will you promise to be careful... It is not fair that you should be drawn into this! Don't allow him to lead you into peril too! The shame—the misery of it all is killing me. I—I—it would kill me to think that we had brought misfortune also to a stranger whose kindness—'

Madeleine had broken down, as I had feared she might, when I suggested her accompanying me into the deserted gardens. She had buried her face in her hands and was weeping almost convulsively.

I laid my hand softly on hers, and as she felt the touch she looked up, her eyes meeting mine wildly.

'Mdlle. Durand,' I said earnestly, 'I will try to persuade your brother to relinquish
any attempt which may be dangerous to him, I promise you! As I have said, I have a plan which I think will relieve him from all immediate danger. But if he is still determined to pursue his way, in spite of peril, and I am unable to dissuade him, then I will give him help. I cannot promise not to. I am sorry, but I think it would not be my nature. You see, I have no one to bother much about me, and he is your brother.'

For a moment our eyes met, and I think she understood me, for her face softened and a faint colour tinged her cheek.

'I will do all I can for your brother,' I continued, 'but should I chance to fail—will you still think kindly of me—let me be your friend?'

'You are almost the only friend I have now, Mr Carlton,' she murmured. 'Ah! if my mother had only lived,' she continued sadly. 'It is terrible to find oneself alone—to know there is no one who cares what becomes of one—no one to turn to. If even Lancelot had never left us!'

I felt that the individual she mentioned had been better at a distance, for, even as it was, he had been nothing but a cause of
misery to her. Still I would help him if I could, for her sake.

'You must indeed have had an unhappy life,' I said at last. 'It is, as you say, terrible to be quite alone—terrible for you to have lost your parents so early. How brave of you to have set to work as you did!'

'I liked the work,' she said simply. 'I am fond of music and painting, and so I am fond of teaching them, I suppose. But I was unfortunate in losing some of my pupils—they got married or left Paris—and I have not been successful in obtaining more. Indeed, of late I fear I could have done little of that kind of work, I have been so anxious. But... but when the lady died with whom my father left me, people were... were no longer kind to me. I lost my money, and I suppose they did not care to trouble about a penniless girl. I have felt it sometimes, although I have tried to be proud and remember who I am, when those whom I have known and been friendly with pass me by in the Bois or the streets as if they had forgotten me; even old neighbours whom we knew in Brittany—people who were welcomed at our house and who were proud to know us.'
THE GARDENS OF THE TUILERIES

'The world is cruel,' I said gently, 'and I am afraid you have found it more cruel than most of us. But you are young—and—and perhaps, who knows, the luck of the Golden Lotus may yet change in your favour!'

Madeleine smiled sadly, and I redoubled my efforts to cheer her and turn her thoughts, if only for a little, from her troubles. I seemed to see brighter days in store for her—though how they were to come about I hardly dared speculate—but my efforts bore some fruit at least, and for a few happy moments—I know not how many, for the time had swallow's wings—we talked together and forgot the present.

The view Madeleine had formed of Durand's intentions was a correct one, as I soon learnt from his own lips. He arrived late in the evening at my chambers, and I noticed that, while he was considerably more composed in his manner, there was a determined look in his eyes and compressed lips that was new to me.

'Good day, Mr Carlton,' he said, gripping my hand warmly as I opened the door for him. 'I couldn't come earlier, I have been rather seedy all day.'
I did not mention that I had seen his sister, and I only murmured a word or two of condolence.

'My sister tells me you have been awfully good to her,' Durand said, after we had seated ourselves, my biggest chair groaning under his weight. 'I am sure I don't know how to thank you, or why you should trouble about a pair of strangers.'

I noticed that he included himself in my troubles, and I supposed he had concluded that my assistance was assured.

'I shall be only too glad to serve Mdle. Durand in any way possible,' I returned quickly.

Durand looked at me for a moment a trifle dubiously, and rubbed his chin. 'The truth is,' he said at length slowly, 'that I was wondering if you would help me in something. But of course, as I am Mdle. Durand's brother, I suppose in helping me you would be helping her, and it would be the same thing.'

'I suppose so,' I said, I fear not too enthusiastically.

'The truth is, it would make her a rich woman,' he continued, as if musingly.

'What would?'

He looked up, and then smiled frankly at
me. 'I see you guess what I am after,' he said. 'Of course you do, though! Are you on for an adventure? I don't think it would mean more than that for you. Though with me, naturally, it will be different. As the frog in the well said, "It's play to you, but it's death to me." It will be me they will go for! Look here, Mr Carlton, I swear I will play straight with Madeleine if you will give me a hand! I see you think I have been a blackguard to her, and I don't expect you to take to me much, or to help me out of love for me myself; but if I get the Golden Lotus, and manage to sell that diamond, she shall have half.'

'You are aware of the difficulties that stand in the way?'

'I ought to be! I had a near squeak in Jamaica. It was the other fellow that time, but it may be me next. You mean Clay and his crew?'

'Yes—partly. And, what is nearly as bad, the police.'

'The police? Well, yes. I suppose they might interfere. But that ain't likely.'

'The grave at Montrouge is watched.'

Durand sprang to his feet with an exclamation. 'Watched? By the police?'
‘Yes. I know the man who has the task in hand.’

Durand stared at me blankly, and then commenced to pace the room, pulling at his red whiskers. ‘That’s bad,’ he said at length. ‘We appear to be between the devil and the deep sea.’

I saw by that ‘we’ that Durand had already assured himself of my assistance, and I presumed that he had already guessed my feelings towards his sister. I suppose, indeed, that he could hardly, as a matter-of-fact, avoid doing so, and perhaps Lizette might have aided him in his conclusions.

‘I will give you a hand,’ I said, ‘if you insist upon it. I have no one to bother about me if anything happened, and the Golden Lotus, if it exists still, certainly seems to be yours. I have no objection to taking a little risk. I have a great regard for Mdlle. Durand which it is useless to discuss at the present moment, and I should be glad to save her any more anxiety. That being understood, is there no other way but this decidedly desperate one of—of—to be frank—securing your safety?’

Durand laughed bitterly. ‘That cursed bill is already overdue,’ he said. ‘Unless
young Carter has succeeded in getting round his father—and he was drinking hard when last I saw him, and did not seem likely to make the attempt—I am already in Queer Street.'

'But surely something could be done with money,' I said. 'I am not a rich man, but I have during the last week drawn seven thousand pounds from my agents, and if you care to give up this other affair, the money is at your service.'

Durand's face flushed purple, and he stopped in his walk and stared at me. 'Good Lord! you are a good chap!' he said hoarsely. 'But it is too late, my dear fellow. Look here! I feel I haven't very long to live. I have been a blackguard and I know it. I never knew, or rather I never recognised the value of a sister like Madeleine before. I have lived a selfish life, and what has it all ended in? For all I know, I am even now pursued by the police! the police! Good God! what would my father say? Never mind, this is what I mean. I am not sunk low enough yet to take money from a man because he has a regard for my sister, or for any other reason either nowadays. If I can get that jewel, which is mine
and Madeleine's by right, well and good! I shall risk my life in getting it. I can settle all there is against me and start afresh, as well as seeing that Madeleine is secured from want. If I can't get it—well, I have an account to square with that man Denver and his friends anyway, and they are dangerous enemies and perhaps they will get the best of the duel. If you are ready to give me your help, I think they won't trouble you, and your only fear, I fancy, will be the French police. I didn't imagine there was much danger of that contingency until to-day, but you seem to believe there is.'

'There is not so much as I might have led you to think even there,' I said, and I related to him what Pierre Guerin had told me in our previous conversations.

'I fancy Pierre might be got to help us, or at least to keep a blind eye for a time,' I said, after he had listened to my explanation.

Durand nodded. 'I happen to have my father's letter with me, and the other papers,' he said. 'I brought them in case it should ever be necessary to prove my claim to the Golden Lotus. If this man Guerin has any sentimental ideas connected with Roger and
his last wishes he can judge from them where he intended the Lotus to go; and as I am my father's heir, I presume it will be the same thing to him.'

'Could you meet Guerin with me to-morrow?' I asked.

'Could you not see him to-night?' he asked. 'There is no time to waste. I do not know why I have not yet heard from or seen that man Clay. You say he was watching my sister at Montmartre. I saw nothing of him; but he must have seen me in all probability, and in that case we haven't much time in which to act. Heaven even knows if he may not already have contrived to elude the watch and get the Golden Lotus himself.'

'No, I fancy he would rather you did the work,' I said. 'I expect he does not want to risk getting mixed up with the police, or he would have completed the task when he first came to Paris. He probably imagines that if you secure the jewel you want he can get it from you. You would not be likely to appeal to the police for protection from him and his friends.'

'There is not much fear of that contingency,' said Durand, grimly.
I looked at my watch. It was already half-past nine.
‘Time presses, as you say,’ I remarked. ‘We might certainly chance to find Guerin at the café which he frequents. It would save a day if we could. If not, we must leave word with the chef, Joseph, a friend of his, and wait patiently until to-morrow. To attempt anything without first sounding him would be to run a quite unnecessary risk of failure.’

We set out at once, walking in silence along the brilliant boulevards and up the Rue Blanche. I preferred to take the longer route to our destination to chancing the darker and more unfrequented streets which would have led us more quickly to our destination. I felt that Durand had chosen a dangerous path, and for Madeleine’s sake I was unwilling to run into possible danger. But I must confess that, as regards my companion himself, he appeared little troubled by any thoughts of peril. I could not help wondering a little at the man, as I watched him striding along by my side, apparently careless of chance recognition, his huge chest and shoulders held erect, and his massive red head towering above the throng on the pave-
ments. From his letter I had judged him to be anything but a man to brave so calmly the unseen dangers which surrounded him, and of which he had already had such terrible experiences.

However, it is a certain thing that approaching peril brings out a man's best or worst qualities; and I could only regret, for Madeleine's sake, that this man's life had so early been directed into a wrong groove.

He turned to me as we left the Rue Blanche and came out onto the Place Clichy. 'Did you see Clay?' he asked quietly.

'Good heavens! no!' I replied anxiously. 'Where?'

'He has been following us for some time now. It is no good looking back. Let him follow. It won't do any harm for him to see us talking with a member of the detective force. I should like to know that man's life! I don't expect he would much care to be too friendly with the Rue Jerusalem if the truth were known.'

I could not help giving a glance behind as we entered the Abbaye de Thelema; but either Durand had been mistaken, or Clay had desisted from pursuit, for I caught no sight of his noticeable figure in the crowd.
We did not find Guerin in the lower room, and I made my way to the chef, who happened to be for a moment disengaged.

' Monsieur Guerin will be here in a few moments, monsieur,' he replied, in answer to my inquiries. 'He has only just left, and he expressed his intention of returning almost immediately in case monsieur should call.'

Durand and I made our way upstairs and seated ourselves at the table overlooking the Place Clichy, where Pierre and I usually conversed.
CHAPTER XVII

WE OBTAIN AN ALLY

'I don't see Clay now,' said Durand, after a moment's inspection of the square below. 'But we are pretty conspicuous from here. What is his game, I wonder? What a fool I was not to take your seven thousand pounds and bolt.'

'The offer is still open,' I said, with a little tinge of surprise.

Durand laughed and tossed a glass of absinthe down his throat. 'No, thanks!' he said. 'I only said what a fool I was, that's all! But then, what else am I but a fool anyway? I can't change my nature, Carlton, and I shall remain a fool. Do you know that danger and excitement seem to have made a new man of me in one way. There must be something of the tiger in me. I rather like being hunted. But only a fool presses one of those animals as Clay is
pressing me now! The spoor is getting too warm—too warm!' 

I glanced at his red face, with the fiery whiskers curling crisply round his large jaws, and his heavy eyes inflamed and bloodshot, and I rather comprehended his allusion. Clay might certainly go too far with a man like this if ever he came to bay.

'You never told me what happened in Jamaica,' I said, after a pause.

Durand flushed angrily. 'I would rather not tell you,' he said savagely. 'It was that hellish time which—which made me desperate. Good Lord! man, it could never be as bad here as it was there, and I can understand those two fellows, Roger and Wilson, losing their nerve. It turned them from brave men into—well, not cowards, but skulkers. It has changed me from a coward into a desperate man. No! I can't tell you about it. You wouldn't understand. Things are different in Europe, or among Europeans. Even Clay himself is not so bad as those . . . It was a long nightmare—a horrible dream! Secret threats—a sense of being never alone, even in the darkness of one's own room—a constant fear of a secret knife—fear of poison—fear of everything—and
yet no enemy to be seen. But I saw something once, and . . . well, I killed it, that's all! If I hadn't I should have been the one to go—killed it like a snake or a tarantula.'

A voice behind us made us both start suddenly. It was Pierre wishing us good evening, but for a moment I was absolutely startled.

Pierre looked curiously at my companion as I introduced the two. 'Monsieur Durand?' he asked.

'Yes, Pierre! Mdlle. Durand's brother. And listen, Pierre! Monsieur Durand's son.'

'Monsieur Durand's son!'

'I should say Captain Durand's son. Captain Durand, who was the protector of Roger, your old acquaintance—or your uncle's.'

Pierre, in spite of his professional aplomb, staggered, and sat down, staring blankly at me. 'Roger's protector! Yes, yes! I remember he used to speak of his old capitaine with much affection—but—but, monsieur, what is all this? Why does that dead man's son rise up like this at a time when . . . monsieur, you told me you
knew nothing of the Montrouje affair! Surely this must mean . . .

I saw that his brain, trained to swift deduction, was leading him nearer the truth than had seemed possible with such a small foundation to go upon.

'Pierre,' I said earnestly, 'I asked you the other day if, when you should hear that Roger—Roger who was so kind to you—had left certain wishes to be fulfilled, you would help to carry them out.'

'Yes, monsieur, and I said "Yes" with all heart I would.'

Pierre was staring at me now in amazement, and Durand sat watching us both intently. A strange presentiment that the future of all of us—Madeleine, Durand, myself, even Pierre—depended on my words, had come to me, and I picked my words very carefully.

'I will be frank with you, Guerin,' I said. 'I do know something about that affair at Montrouje. It was an attempt to carry out that dead man's last wishes. You are in charge of the affair, I know. That is why I have come to you. What is your gratitude to Roger worth? Will you place it against your duty to your employers—mind, I do not
ask you to do anything that is difficult, or, I think, really dishonourable to yourself—still, you place your gratitude against one night's failure in your duty—one night's blindness—deafness—to what you may hear or see!' 'Monsieur! monsieur!' stammered Pierre, turning red. 'You are hard—you are hard on me! Fail in my duty! be blind to what I may see! It is much to ask of a man who, believe me, monsieur, has never yet failed in what he thought his duty to his employers.' 'In what he thought his duty?' I said quickly. 'Well, let us see! We will try another way. Can I give you a confidence?' 'Ah, monsieur, that is a very different thing!' 'I have your word?' 'A thousand times, Monsieur Carlton and Monsieur Durand,' gasped Pierre, greatly relieved. 'One can forget a confidence,' he continued with a little twinkle in his eye. 'You had better forget this, then,' I returned, 'if it does not agree with your ideas to remember it. When Roger sought your uncle's house he wished to hide, he wished to escape—but not from his wife. He had no wife.' 'No wife? But that terrible woman?'
'I am afraid she was too terrible to exist, Pierre. She was—unlike your—ahem!—uncle's wife—a creature of the imagination merely. Those from whom he fled were enemies of another kind—enemies unscrupulous, relentless, desperate men who would stop at no crime, no villainy to gain their ends; who had already murdered Roger's cousin, Wilson, whose heir your friend was. This man Wilson had become possessed, by honourable means, and during battle, of a jewel of great value. The jewel was precious to certain people in India where Wilson had fought, and fought bravely. These people were as determined to regain their treasure as Roger was to keep it. They pursued him relentlessly, and in the end they murdered him, but without succeeding in their endeavour to obtain the jewel. This Wilson contrived to pass on, through Mr Durand's father, to his cousin Roger. Captain Durand assisted Roger, as he had assisted Wilson, and the man escaped to Europe. When he sought your uncle's roof he had the jewel with him; but he was still pursued. You know the means he took to escape from his enemies. Well, he failed!'}
'Failed, monsieur!'

'Yes, failed—for he, too, was murdered, in Jamaica. On his death-bed he left this treasure which he had sacrificed his life for to the other friend who had helped him. I don't mean your uncle—I mean Captain Durand. Mr Durand here will show you his last letter. You will perhaps be able to recognise the handwriting, as you say you have kept his letter to your uncle.'

'Ah, yes, monsieur, kept it, and often looked at it too, in memory of a brave man.'

'Well, Captain Durand had a wife and children, and he was a man of wealth. The lady whom he had married refused to allow him to touch the bequest which might also bring death and misery to her home, and he bowed to her decision. Monsieur Durand is his father's only son. The time has come when the need he has for this treasure has overpowered his natural fear of the consequences which have to the present time overtaken all who have been possessed of it. By right the jewel is his, I think, as the Koh-i-noor is our Queen's. It has been bought with the blood of brave men and soiled with the deeds of desperate
men. Can you guess where that jewel has lain all these long years?"

'\textit{Mon Dieu}, monsieur! In Roger's grave?'

'In Roger's grave! Now, will you help us?'

Pierre banged down his head on the table. 'Yes, monsieur, I will—and death to the scoundrels who killed those two brave men!'

I saw that I had aroused the Frenchman's quick sympathies in him, and I sat back in my chair with a sigh of relief, while Durand clenched and unclenched his hands in excitement. 'Then we are safe, Carlton?' he said.

Pierre looked up with a sudden idea. 'Then it was you, monsieur, who made the attempt which has so baffled us?' he said quickly.

I hesitated. My confidence did not go to the extent of bringing Mdlle. Durand's name into the question. I attempted to laugh. 'I am not going to confess anything of the kind, Pierre,' I said, 'nor is Monsieur Durand,' seeing that the latter was about to speak. 'You must not expect us to put a noose round our necks.'
WE OBTAIN AN ALLY

‘Ah, monsieur,’ replied Pierre, eagerly, ‘you cannot think, after what you have just told me, that I would—’

‘No, no! It is all right, Pierre; I was merely joking,’ I interrupted, contented to see that I had misled him. ‘But there must be no failing this time!’

‘You say, monsieur, that Captain Durand’s son is prepared to face the danger of recovering this jewel of Roger’s? But surely that poor man’s enemies are long since dead?’ said Pierre, thoughtfully.

‘They are dead, doubtless, but they too have left a legacy to their descendants—a legacy of hatred and revenge. Their emissaries have already attempted Monsieur Durand’s life, and one of them, at least, is here in Paris.’

‘The man who shadows Mdlle. Durand?’

‘Yes, I believe so.’

‘A tall, dark Englishman, with a pale face and black hair?’

‘Yes.’

Pierre jumped from his seat. ‘Ah, monsieur, but it is he I meet so often in the neighbourhood of Montrouje. He shadows me too, then? But no! it is Roger’s grave, eh, monsieur? Well, let
me assure you that he has had no success there! When I am not at Montrouje in the evenings there is always a watch kept, nevertheless. But, monsieur, in spite of that, accidents might happen. It seems rash to leave poor Roger’s treasure so long unprotected, eh? A secret is no longer a secret when it is known to so many.’

‘You are right, Guerin,’ said Durand, with a laugh. ‘What about to-night? But you haven’t yet given us your ideas on the subject.’

‘To-night, monsieur? No, that would not do. There are the necessary tools to be obtained — and other preparations to make. No, to-night is impossible! Besides, my man is there now, and I would wish to give him something to do elsewhere when we go breaking the laws. He is a sharp fellow, is Paul, and he will be too sharp, I assure you, for this dark man; but his sharpness would be inconvenient when we are there on business.’

‘Will to-morrow do, then?’ I asked. ‘Remember, time is short.’

‘Yes, Monsieur Carlton, I can have all ready by to-morrow night. I fear I shall get small honour with my chief for my
conduct of the Montrouge affair—but then, I never expected much from it; for, to tell you the truth, Monsieur Carlton, I never hoped to discover what there was at the bottom of it all. It was my little knowledge which ruined me. Had I known nothing at all of the history of that grave, who knows, I might have suspected—at least smugglers. As it is, how could I think! But never mind, I shall have done honour to a brave man’s memory, and five hundred pounds is well worth a little lost glory!’

‘Quite so, Pierre,’ I said quickly. ‘And another five hundred pounds will perhaps compensate you for a little lost—what shall we say?—conscience. For certainly you must have your share of the profits of the expedition if you bear the pains.’

Pierre gasped. ‘Five hundred pounds, monsieur! Why, it is a fortune—another start in life! It is more than I earn in a year and a half.’

‘All the better, Pierre,’ I laughed.

‘Yes; but, monsieur,’ Pierre continued, a little sadly, ‘I wish you had not mentioned the money. I would rather have helped Monsieur Durand for Roger’s sake.’
We laughed aside his protestations. 'Well, Pierre, it is getting late. Where shall we meet to-morrow?' I asked, 'and when?'

He considered for a moment. 'Monsieur knows the steps leading down to the baths in the Seine, near the Bridge Henri Quatre?'

'Yes.'

'I shall be there at dark to-morrow. I shall have everything that is necessary. Remember, I was a gravedigger's son!'

'Nephew,' I corrected.

Pierre grinned, discomfited. 'Yes, monsieur, nephew!' he said hastily, and bowing, he left us, and we made our way out.

I certainly could not help a feeling of relief at having won Pierre over to our side, now that I had finally decided to throw in my lot with Durand in his enterprise. I felt how much we could rely on his experience and savoir-faire. Even the tools necessary to our task would have been difficult to obtain without exciting suspicion, and certainly it would have been difficult to have disposed of them until the night should come. Also it was half the battle to feel that we had no occa-
sion to fear the opposition of the Law, for the Law, in the person of Pierre, would be on our side.

As for Durand, he was like a boy just released from school, and could hardly contain himself. 'By Jove, we shall do them after all!' he cried, gripping my arm. 'My little Madeleine shall be an heiress yet, and I... well, perhaps even I shall have a time of luck...'. He stopped suddenly and passed his hand quickly over his forehead. 'I say, Carlton,' he said slowly, 'do you believe in presentiments? It's a funny thing, but I don't seem to see myself after to-morrow.'

'What do you mean?' I said. 'I don't understand you.'

'I don't know. I can't exactly explain what I do mean,' he said, taking my arm and looking down at me with a puzzled look on his red face. 'I have always been able—I daresay it's a common trick—to see myself doing certain things in advance. How can I explain? For instance, I could see myself talking to you this morning before I met you. When I sailed from Colombo I could see myself, in imagination, on the boat, landing, reaching Paris.
I could imagine the boulevards again. I can't see myself doing anything after to-morrow. Why is it? Why can't I see myself?'

'Good Heavens, man! because it's dark, I suppose!' I said, rather irritably, for his words had given me an unpleasant shiver. 'I suppose, too, that you are excited. Besides, how could you see yourself after to-morrow, when goodness only knows how this affair to-morrow night is going to turn out!'

'Yes, that is it,' he said slowly, 'that is it! How will it turn out—how will it turn out?'

We had reached by this time the entrance to the street where Madeleine dwelt. It was a dismal little thoroughfare, and badly lighted, and there were few people about. There was one man, however, standing under the lamp at the corner of the road; and as we passed him at a distance of about ten yards or so I gave an exclamation and gripped Durand's arm instinctively. It was necessary, for as he followed my gaze he made a sudden movement as if to spring forward. 'Clay!' he cried, 'by all that's holy!'
WE OBTAIN AN ALLY

Even as he spoke the man stepped forward to meet us, and we stood for an instant facing each other. Yes, it was Clay—Denver as I had known him—and his sudden appearance on top of Durand’s last speech seemed a gloomy enough omen to me. He stood quietly looking at Durand, a wicked glitter in his eyes, and an evil smile came to his pale lips as he saw me hold Durand back. ‘Remember!’ I whispered to Durand, ‘remember what we have to do! Wait at least till to-morrow is over! Wait!’

Durand was almost foaming with rage at the other’s coolness, and it was all I could do to keep his arm in mine, even though, as I could see, he was putting some restraint on himself in obedience to my words.

Clay, however, stepped coolly up to him. ‘Mr Durand,’ he said coldly and sharply, ‘your three months are up. Why have you not fulfilled your bargain?’

‘Curse you!’ cried Durand. ‘I made no bargain with you.’

‘Oh!’ said Clay, calmly. ‘Well, we made one with you then. You have not kept to its terms.’
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

‘You scoundrel!’ cried Durand, wildly, and struggling to release himself from my grasp. ‘You scoundrel!’

Clay held up his hand. ‘There is a gardien watching us,’ he said, with a gesture towards the officer who was watching us curiously, attracted, I suppose, by the loudness of Durand’s tones. ‘Neither you nor I wish to attract the attention of the law to us—at present! Besides, altercation is useless. I have only a word or two to say. Will you, sir—to me—kindly let go of your friend’s arm for a moment? I have something to tell him.’

I released Durand’s arm, and he, with an effort, appeared to restrain himself and turned away with Clay, while I stood a few paces off, prepared to rush forward at any moment.

However, nothing happened, and after a moment Durand joined me again, Clay walking off in the opposite direction.

Durand gave a harsh laugh as he retook my arm, but I noticed that his face was pale as death and his hand trembled. ‘An unexpected meeting—and an unexpected ending to it,’ he said, as we walked on. ‘I never thought that I should stand face
to face with that man again and both of us leave the spot! It is a pity that gardien arrived so apropos!—a pity for me, at least! Clay has gone free, and in allowing him to do so I fancy I have signed my own death-warrant. Sentence has already been passed, he tells me.'

'Sentence?'

'Yes. Or rather they give me till to-morrow morning to complete the bargain, as Clay calls it. Then!...'

'You are going to persist? You won't do as they wish, then?'

Durand turned to me quickly. 'Are you afraid?' he said brusquely.

'No, I don't think so,' I returned.

'Then neither am I,' he said. 'Let us forget Clay and go our own way. Their mummeries haven't frightened me! I say, though, what about my to-morrow after this, eh? Well, well, Clay and I have got to meet again first. You will be there to-morrow?'

'I will call for you on my way,' I said, and we parted.
CHAPTER XVIII

WE MAKE A DISCOVERY

It is my disposition to get over disagreeables which are inevitable as quickly as possible; and I think if ever I have the misfortune to be condemned to death I should prefer to be ‘helped off’ to-day rather than six weeks hence. That being so, a more miserable time, I believe, I never spent than the twenty hours or so which dragged their weary length along before the time for setting forth on our expedition at length arrived.

In my misery and impatience the affair we were about to undertake assumed gigantic proportions, and I commenced to foresee a hundred obstacles to its success. Suppose, I imagined, that Pierre were to prove unfaithful and betray his trust, and, arriving at the grave, we were to find ourselves in the hands of the police. Or, another alternative, what if the temptation of himself recovering
the Golden Lotus should have been too strong for him and he should have fore-
stalled us by a day? With his opportunities the thing was already as good as done. And then I thought of this man Clay and his mysterious mission, his stealthy shadowing of Durand and his sister, his meeting with us on the previous evening, and his warning.

Finally I succeeded in working myself into such a state of nervous excitement that I rushed out of the house and spent the rest of the day wildly pacing the streets.

I had arranged to call at Montmartre for Durand before making for the assignation with Pierre, for I hoped to obtain a last glimpse of Madeleine and assure her again of my support for her brother; but I found myself pacing up and down outside her house, when evening came, a good hour before the time appointed.

Fortunately Durand chanced to be no less eager than myself, and, spying me from the window, he put on his hat and coat and descended to the door to meet me. Madeleine, to my joy, accompanied him to the door, and I had time to murmur a word to her and receive the least small pressure from her trembling fingers ere Durand hurried
me away and we set our faces toward the Quai Henri Quatre.

The evening was a miserable one, and while it could not well have been better for our task, it was anything but inspiriting. Durand was feverishly impatient, and almost dragged me along, eliciting various uncomplimentary remarks referring to the manners of *les Anglais* as we struck against occasional foot-passengers whom his huge bulk invariably caused to stagger.

'If only the man is there!' he kept repeating; 'if only Guerin doesn't fail us!'

Fortunately that contingency, which we both dreaded, did not arise, and, early as we arrived at the place of meeting, Pierre was there before us. As we descended the dark steps leading down from the Quai to the baths, a figure rose to meet us from the shadow of the wall. It was Guerin. He was dressed in a long dark overcoat and was heavily muffled about the neck; and he carried in his hands a long and apparently weighty bag about the size and shape of a cricket kit.

'Monsieur is early,' he said to me as I grasped his hand warmly in the relief
I felt at my suspicions of the earlier part of the day being unrealised. 'But I am not sure that it matters, as the night is so dark.'

'No, no! For Heaven's sake let's get it over!' said Durand.

Pierre nodded silently, and, shouldering his bag, led the way up the steps again on to the Quai. 'It will not take long, Monsieur Durand, once we are there. I have got the necessary tools, and we shall soon be on our way home again with poor Roger's treasure.'

'Heaven grant it!' I ejaculated.

On the Quai Pierre stopped and glanced around him for a moment. 'You have seen no sign of anyone following you, monsieur?' he asked.

'Not a soul who looked in the least suspicious,' I returned. 'We have certainly seen no sign of Mr Clay.'

'Bon!' said Pierre, shortly, 'let us march, then!'

As we made our way along the damp and muddy pavement of the Quai, in the direction of Montrouge, I could not help recalling that former evening when I had so fruitlessly pursued that man Denver—or
Clay as he appeared to call himself—in reality. That evening, disappointing as it had seemed to me at the time, had, after all, led me to a nearer acquaintance with Madeleine Durand; had led me to know her better and trust—not love—her more, for I knew now that I had loved her from the first moment when she had appeared to my sight, pale and trembling from the task she had undertaken with such courage and devotion. Where would this evening—in some ways so strangely similar—lead me? I wondered. It may have been the effect of the gloomy night or prescience of the events yet before us that made my heart feel heavy as I asked myself the question.

While I pondered Durand and Pierre strode along by my side, each wrapped in his own thoughts. Pierre I fancied seemed cool and determined, his experience of many a dangerous undertaking rendering him, I suppose, to a certain extent careless of forebodings. Durand, on the other hand, I fancied, was nervous and ill at ease. He clenched his hands as he walked, and muttered impatiently when some chance block in the traffic served to delay us for a moment.
WE MAKE A DISCOVERY

These accidents, however, grew rarer as time went on and we commenced to approach our destination. The neighbourhood we entered now was dark and deserted, and when at length we came to the cul-de-sac, at the termination of which was the cemetery, we appeared to be the only foot-passengers in sight.

At the foot of the wall over which I had climbed on the night when I had so strangely recovered Madeleine's ring, Pierre halted and placed his bag on the ground. 'We will wait here for a few moments,' he said quietly, 'in case of accidents. If we are followed, in all probability we shall see some sign of pursuit during the next quarter of an hour. Meanwhile I may as well amuse myself by putting my tools together.'

He opened the bag and emptied the contents noiselessly out on to the ground. I looked at them with curiosity.

It was evidently not the ordinary kit of a gravedigger, and Pierre smiled as he saw me take up a light steel crow-bar, cleverly contrived to pack up into a space about a third of its length.

'Monsieur is admiring my weapons?' he said proudly. 'Yes, they are neat, eh?
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

Their owner, and inventor too, by the way, should be in the galleys if we all had our deserts. But it isn't always easy to prove what we detectives know perfectly well. And so, for want of proof, Jean Buteaud still plies his trade. A poor trade too, nowadays, considering the risk, and the fact that poor Jean has no treasures but a poor ring or so to dig for, and a body for which some student may give him a few francs.'

'But surely it is sufficient proof that he had these tools?' I remarked.

'Well, you see, monsieur, I have them now, but I am not a body-snatcher. Well, well, one must use what tools one can at times, and so I preferred to borrow poor Jean's, although he knows that some day I may have to tap him on the shoulder and say . . .'

'What's that?' cried Durand, suddenly. We both started. 'What, monsieur?' asked Pierre, springing up quickly with the crow-bar in his hand.

'I thought I heard a whistle,' Durand replied. We listened for a second or two, but no sound came to us.

'I think you must have been mistaken,
Durand,' I said at length. 'This waiting in the cold and wet is playing tricks with your imagination.'

'Yet I could have sworn I heard something,' murmured Durand, doubtfully. Pierre did not seem so easily satisfied. With a quick spring he leaped to the top of the wall, and diving down into the darkness we heard him strike a light and commence moving about on the other side.

After a time he called to us softly. 'I can see nothing, Mr Durand,' he said. 'We had better get to work. Please drop the tools over one by one, and come yourselves as quietly as possible.'

We followed his injunctions, and in a moment we were standing by his side. Pierre had by this time lighted a tiny bull's-eye lantern, and he flashed the little ray of light about him here and there as he led us along by the foot of the wall.

At last he halted before a little mound, the surface of which appeared to have been slightly disturbed of late. 'This is poor Roger's grave,' he said, turning the light of the lantern upon it.

Durand looked down and gave an
exclamation. 'Good heavens! someone has been here!' he cried.

I kicked him hastily on the shin, under cover of darkness, to bring him to his senses, and attempted to laugh as if he had perpetrated a joke. 'You can't take our friend Pierre in,' I said. And Guerin, who had looked up in surprise for a moment, smiled.

'Ah, Monsieur Durand doesn't quite trust me yet, I see,' he said 'Well, if you gentlemen had had these tools of Jean's on that night you would have done more than scratch the surface like this.'

'You forget that we—that is, the male-factors—were disturbed,' I said, as if still in jest; 'they had no time to complete their work.'

Pierre made no reply. He was stooping down over the grave and marking out the line of the mound with a spade while Durand stood watching him, shivering with impatience.

'Will one of you gentlemen give me a hand with the spade?' said Pierre, rising to his feet. 'We cannot do this job in the ordinary way—the way Jean Buteaud and his fellows worked. They do not trouble
to raise the coffin on an expedition such as they undertake. They merely clear away the earth at the head of the coffin, then they raise the lid with a lever. It breaks under the weight of the earth, and the body is drawn out by the head. The clothes are removed and replaced in the coffin, and all is covered up again. There is little enough then to tell the casual eye that they have been at their games.'

'Good heavens! that's enough, Pierre!' cried Durand. 'You make us shudder! Thank goodness this is none of that sort of work! But give me the spade, it is bad enough as it is. I must do something to keep myself going.'

He snatched the spade from Pierre's hands, Pierre took the crowbar and the two commenced to work vigorously, but as silently as was possible under the circumstances. Meanwhile, I was perforce compelled to stand by idly and watch their progress; and I could not but feel that mine was the most unpleasant task of the three.

As Durand had remarked, this was no resurrection business that we were embarked upon, but nevertheless it commenced to
wear a gloomy enough appearance. Even to the strongest mind it will be admitted, I think, that there is always an unpleasant thrill about the atmosphere of a graveyard on a dark night; but when one feels that one is there for the purpose of actually breaking open a grave—even though it be an empty one—the thrill becomes one of almost horror. Given every excuse, we were, after all, engaged in desecrating holy ground and bringing one of the lowest passions of mankind into conjunction with all the sacred associations of the spot. It seemed impossible at the time, too, to feel sure that this grave was indeed an empty one, that this strange romance of the Golden Lotus should be in reality true. Or, even granting all that, there came the fear that perhaps Pierre might have mistaken the spot or the plan have been incorrect. In that case, the coffin being raised at length, would some ghastly witness to our crime confront us after all?

As I watched my companions working eagerly and silently by the light of the little lantern, and saw the gloom of the place grow each moment more apparent under the influence of the mist and the
rain which began to beat down upon us, hiding the silent tombstones from our sight, I felt myself lost in wonder and admiration at the bravery of those two women who had also attempted this deed. I felt amazed at their determination. It could indeed have been but the knowledge of the purity of her motives which had enabled Madeleine Durand to go through all the horrors she must have experienced. Only the thought that her brother’s life depended on her would have kept her firm to her purpose, and I could well comprehend the terror, the fear, written on her lovely face and in her haunted eyes when she had returned that night from her uncompleted task.

An exclamation from Pierre and Durand roused me from my meditation, and starting forward, I saw that they were both bending down intently over the grave.

‘We are right,’ said Durand, eagerly, pointing down, ‘there it is! “Henry Roger” see, there on the coffin!’

I looked down into the now opened grave. By the small ray of the lantern, which Pierre directed downwards, I could see the mouldy and discoloured coffin with
the engraving still showing faintly out from the rusty plate.

'Quick, quick! Lift it up!' ejaculated Durand, shivering with impatience. 'For Heaven's sake lift it up!'

In a moment Pierre had the ropes round the casket, and with our united strength we drew it up from the grave and rested it gently on the grass. Then Pierre, placing the lantern where the light could fall full upon it, commenced to force the coffin open.

Durand turned to me, stamping his feet and tearing at his red whiskers. 'I can't stand this suspense!' he groaned. 'Good Lord! why doesn't he hurry up? Will the Lotus be there?—will it be there?'

Another second, and with a sigh of satisfaction Pierre had wrenched the lid off and we both rushed forward. Durand gave a cry and threw himself down by the grave, for in the centre of the lumps of lead with which the coffin was almost filled there rested a small oak casket. In a moment he had the little box out and open in his lap, and swiftly seizing some shining object he tore the lantern from Pierre's hand and turned the light upon it.
WE MAKE A DISCOVERY

Pierre gave a gasp of wonder and admiration as we pressed round. 'What a diamond!' he cried. 'Mon Dieu! what a jewel! The whole Rue de la Paix could not show anything like it!' I echoed his astonishment as I saw, shining in Durand's hands, imbedded in the leaves of the Golden Lotus, whose centre it formed, a yellow diamond of such size and radiance that it seemed to surpass aught that I had ever seen or dreamed of.

This wonderful stone was exquisitely cut, and from every facet there gleamed fresh and more dazzling coruscations of colour, while the beauty and workmanship of the golden part of the flower, with its minute tracery of every petal and leaf, made it seem not less wonderful than the glittering gem itself.

'Ah, monsieur,' said Pierre, as he gazed upon Durand's treasure with shining eyes, 'you are fortunate truly! It is not to be wondered at that poor Roger gave his life for the Golden Lotus!'

Durand looked up from his rapt contemplation of the jewel and laughed hoarsely. 'You are right, Pierre!' he said. 'By heaven, you are right! And they want
to take it from me! Eh, a life, you say? Why, it's worth twenty lives! Twenty lives of toil mightn't buy it! How long would it take you, Pierre, to earn its value? Life! Why . . .'

We stopped, for in a second Pierre was struck down from behind and I was struggling for my life with some unseen assailant who had me by the throat.

Yet, even as I struggled, I heard Durand gasp out, 'The whistle! curse it! I was right!' and I saw him, clasping the Golden Lotus to his breast, turn and charge madly down on a crowd of figures who appeared to rise silently almost from beneath his feet. I heard him shouting hoarsely, fall heavily, and rise again, while I struggled to free myself and go to his help; and then a vicious blow from some new enemy felled me to the ground and I saw no more.
CHAPTER XIX

TRAGEDY

When I recovered my senses, stiffened with the cold, and with my head aching furiously, I sat for a while staring foolishly about me and feebly wiping from my lips the blood that trickled down my face. Where were Pierre and Durand? Were they dead?

Rising stiffly, I felt in my pocket. Thank God! I had a box of matches with me! I struck one; but my still trembling fingers refused to hold it, and it fell, extinguishing itself in the damp grass. I made an effort. Madeleine's brother—Madeleine's brother—where was he? The second match lighted faintly the violated grave—the broken coffin—the ground, muddy and trampled from our struggle. Nothing more. There were no signs of my companions.

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I lighted match after match until I had searched futilely all the immediate neighbourhood of Roger's grave, but with no result, and, dazed and confused, I sank down again and buried my face in my hands, trying to collect my thoughts. Pierre and Durand both gone! What did it mean? They could not have escaped and left me lying there helpless and wounded—they would not! Besides, I had myself seen Pierre struck down. Then had they been carried off? If that were so, why was I left? . . .

Presently I rose and staggered to my feet. The night air was beginning to revive me. I raised my hands and commenced to button up my coat, shivering. My fingers rustled on a piece of paper as they fumbled with the buttons, and I snatched it away impatiently, about to fling it down. Then I stopped. What was it doing there? I struck a match and examined it eagerly. It was a scrap of an envelope torn hastily. On it were only a few words in French—'Courage! I am after them,—Pierre'—but they made my heart beat with a wild feeling of gratitude for the writer. The brave fellow!
He had known that there was no time to be lost in attending to me, and with admirable resolve he had set out to track these men who had attacked us, but he had not forgotten me in his danger and haste, and, aware of my dismay when I should recover and find myself alone, he had left those cheering words behind him.

‘Courage! I am after them.’ Yes, they were grateful words to me in my confusion and anxiety; for it seemed to me that there was more in them than appeared at first sight—that a deeper meaning underlay them than the few words themselves might be expected to express. The last few moments had given me some idea of Pierre’s courage and resource, who, in the moment of excitement and peril, had yet been able to think of me and pencil that line of hope; and I set myself to attempting to follow out the writer’s thoughts. ‘Courage! I am after them.’ That meant surely that there was hope yet, and that he believed in his chance of overtaking ‘them’ before—before Durand was dead? For that they would kill him now I could not doubt, these men who
had so sternly followed him. That they had taken him, and that it had been planned beforehand, I felt was certain, or why had Pierre and I been wounded and left while he had to all appearances been spared? How I blamed our carelessness when, in spite of Clay's warning, in spite of that signal heard by Durand, we had kept no guard, but had been taken utterly by surprise and routed—we three men who should surely have made at least a fight of it! And this was the result of my promise to Madeleine Durand! This was my care of her brother! I ground my teeth in desperation as I thought of it. Why, that was the only reason I had been there? What was the Golden Lotus to me? It was a smile from her, a word of gratitude for the sake of the brother she loved that I had hoped to win, worth to me far more than even that wonderful yellow stone! But Pierre had kept his senses. There was a hope there, if I could only find him.

I took out my handkerchief and bound it hastily round my head. The wound on my temple had ceased to bleed by
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this time, and I crammed my hat down over the bandage, careless of the pain. Pierre's rooms were the first place I must make for, and to discover them I must seek out Joseph, the chef. I hoped that with my hat over my eyes, and my coat collar turned up, I might not cause too much consternation in the Abbaye de Thelema. At anyrate there was no time to waste in repairs.

My head felt dizzy at first as I made my way back along the well-remembered way; but the rain still fell and refreshed me, and as I walked I grew stronger.

Fortunately the Abbaye de Thelema was not an early-closing establishment, and Joseph was still at his work when I made my way up to him, careless of the murmur that greeted me from the occupants of the crowded tables.

'Give me Pierre Guerin's address!' I said hastily. 'It is a matter of life and death.'

'Mon Dieu! monsieur!' gasped the fat little chef, pausing with a ladle in mid-air. 'Mon Dieu! you have had an accident.'

'It is nothing—nothing much,' I said
hastily. 'I have been knocked down, that is all.'

'Ah! these English! Knocked down! That is all! And covered with blood! Ah, _mon Dieu!_ But Pierre? What of him?'

'I don't know. His life is in danger—and another man's too! I must find him at once.'

Joseph looked at me in dismay, tortured evidently by doubts.

'But, Monsieur Carlton, it is against his strict injunctions. You see it would not do for people to know where our friend lives. He has many enemies who might play him bad turns. But you, I know, are a friend of Pierre's, and you say his life . . .'

I tore a hundred-franc note from my pocket. 'I mean him no harm, Joseph,' I said. 'You must know that! Listen! here is a hundred francs. You can have more to-morrow if you want it. Tell me your address!'

Joseph looked up still dubiously. Then he took the note with trembling fingers. 'I will tell you, monsieur,' he said. 'I believe you, and I will tell you! But,
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monsieur, if you are speaking false to me, and mean harm to Pierre, beware! I love Pierre, and I will kill you like a dog!'
The little Frenchman hissed out the words, and flourished his ladle so wildly that I started back for a moment. Then I held out my hand.

'All right, Joseph, so you shall! Pierre is a good fellow, I believe, and you are right to stand up for him! You can kill me if any harm comes to him. Now the address?'
The little chef looked at me for a second, and then shook my hand violently. 'Pardon, monsieur! Pardon. You are a brave man too, I see. I am quick-tempered! Forgive me! Yes. The address is—is—'

'Well?'

'Monsieur, you are sure it is all right? This blood—your accident—?'

'These are the very reasons,' I said impatiently. 'Come, man, even now Pierre himself may be in worse case! Come on! the address.'

'I live in the Rue de Lazarette, monsieur, on the fifth floor, No. 18. Pierre has the opposite flat. Madame Lefarge, his
housekeeper, will give you information con-
cerning him if you tell her you come from
Joseph.'

'Thanks! I will not forget you, Joseph,'
I said, and I hurried out on my way to
Pierre's rooms.

I had little hope, it is true, of finding
the detective at home when I reached the
Rue Lazarette, but I felt that his rooms
would be the first place he would make
for when he should be free to return;
and I had no better plan in my mind
than to rest there and await him.

I climbed the five flights of stairs, at
the address Joseph had given me, and
choosing at hazard one of the two doors
which faced me, I tapped and waited.

The door was opened speedily, and a
plump, well-featured woman inquired my
business brusquely.

'Monsieur Pierre Guerin?' I queried.
Then, mindful of the chef's injunction, 'I
come from Joseph at the Abbaye de
Thelema.'

The woman flushed over her plump
cheeks and tossed her head, turning away,
as it seemed to me, impatiently. 'Oh, we
want no "Josephs" here,' she said sharply,
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and to my surprise she made as if to shut the door.

It seemed that the fat chef's introduction was not so effective as he had imagined it would be, and with a little smile to myself I changed my attack. 'I want to see Monsieur Guerin,' I said. 'I have business of the utmost importance with him.'

The plump lady turned again, and for a moment looked at me keenly. Then she softened. 'Monsieur is wounded?' she asked kindly.

'Yes, Pierre and I had an adventure to-night!' I replied. 'I lost him by an accident. He left me a note. Here it is. You will recognise his hand, I presume.'

The woman glanced at the note. 'You are the English gentleman he has told me of, I suppose, Monsieur—Monsieur—'

'Monsieur Carlton.'

'Ah, yes, monsieur. I have heard him speak of you. I think I understand. There was an expedition to-night?'

'Yes, to Montrouje. Can you tell me where Guerin is?'

'Indeed, I see now, monsieur, that you
are the gentleman he mentioned. Monsieur must excuse me. One must be careful! Monsieur Guerin was here just now.'

'Here?'

'Yes, monsieur. But he has gone out again. Does monsieur think that by chance he has gone to monsieur's rooms to see him?'

'I don't think he knows my address,' I replied doubtfully.

'Ah! one never knows,' replied the woman. 'It is his business to know things, and I should not be surprised if he did.'

'Thank you,' I returned. 'At all events I will try my rooms first. If he is not there I will return. Will you tell him?'

The woman bowed, and I hastened off with the hope that she might after all be right. At least Pierre was safe and still able to help me, and I felt a great relief in being assured of that fact.

When I reached the Rue Tronchet, to my joy I recognised the figure of Pierre walking slowly up and down before my house. 'Thank heaven! you are come, monsieur,' he cried, as he hurried towards me. 'I have been awaiting you for nearly an hour. I almost began to fear that your wound was
worse than I had imagined. I had little
time to examine you.'

'Oh, I soon recovered, Pierre—though it
was a nasty knock I got,' I replied. 'I am
glad you left that note. I never thought of
finding you here, though, and I have wasted
an hour in trying to find your address. But
tell me! Where is Monsieur Durand, and
what did that attack mean?'

Pierre looked at me anxiously. 'You are
very pale, monsieur,' he said. 'Are you
sure you are equal to another expedition?'

'Yes, quite,' I said eagerly. 'I feel quite
well now. What is to be done?—where are
these men?'

'Very well, monsieur, if you are sure,
let us set out; the quicker the better,'
and taking my arm kindly, for in spite of
myself I staggered slightly, he drew me
along the street in the direction of the Gare
St Lazare.

'But those men? Mr Durand? Tell me,
Pierre,' I queried again.

'The men are by this time back in
Montmartre,' Pierre said quickly, 'scattered
about in a dozen different haunts. They
have done this work, and I suppose got
their pay. It is not them we need trouble
about. They knew nothing of the business they were on, or you may be sure the last thing in the world Alphonse the Souteneur would have done would have been to give me that smack which rolled me over. Fortunately I caught hold of him as I fell, and brought him down, and managed to get a glimpse of him at the lantern before his friends put my light out. However, I am pretty hard to kill, and when I came to I remembered my glimpse of Alphonse's ugly face. I know where to find him, and I put my hand on him within half an hour of the time they laid us out. Ah, monsieur! you should have seen bold Alphonse's face when he knew whom it was that he and his barrière bullies had fallen against. He was pretty humble, I can tell you, and it all came out. You see, Alphonse would not fall out with the police for much—for very much; his living would be gone. Well, it appears that they—Alphonse and his friends—were hired for this job by an Englishman, a tall, dark man with a white face, who had planned it out all very cleverly, eh, monsieur? And they did their work well, too! It was that wonderful jewel—ah, mon Dieu! that jewel—which took all our attention, you see,
monsieur, and they are used to that kind of night work.'

'Yes, Pierre, but Monsieur Durand?—and Clay?—what of them?' I said, burning with impatience, though Pierre still hurried me along even while he talked.

'We are going to find them, monsieur! Patience a little longer! Another ten minutes, and who knows what we may not find? Let me tell you, monsieur, I don't think Monsieur Durand is in danger at present. I got Clay's address from Alphonse. He lives alone in a deserted house, only one room of which is furnished. Alphonse and his fellows carried Mr Durand there after they had got rid of us. *Mon Dieu!* what a terrible man that Monsieur Durand!'

'Was he hurt?'

'Little, I think, monsieur. But he hurt one or two of them. *Mon Dieu!* they say he was like one enraged. For a moment they thought he would even get away. He shook them like rats, Alphonse swears, and it was only when half a dozen of them were upon him at once that they could do anything with him. As far as they know, he is alone with this Monsieur Clay in his house, and though he is bound, *peste!* I would
not like to try and hurt him if I were Monsieur Clay!'

'Where is this house?' I asked.

'Not far from Mdlle. Durand's apartment,' said Pierre; 'within five minutes of this spot.'

Thank God! Durand was safe so far! But alone with Clay, and in his power! I did not like the idea of that.

We reached a dark and narrow street near the heights of Montmartre, and made our way swiftly down it until we came to a blank high wall which blocked up the end. In the corner beneath this wall, and half hidden in its shadow, stood a lonely-looking house with heavily-barred windows. No lights shone from within, and the generally deserted air of the place seemed to proclaim it tenantless; but Pierre, marching boldly up to the door, knocked loudly upon the panels, and peering through the slit which served for a letter-box, we waited anxiously for a reply to the summons.

No reply came, however, and I turned to Pierre. 'Can't we get in somehow?' I asked. 'Are you sure this is the house?'

'Yes, monsieur, this is the house. It is in this very place that I arrested Arton the
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"coiner" three years ago. I did not expect that Monsieur Clay would open the door calmly and ask us to walk in. But it is always as well to try straightforward means first. Get in? I got in through the cellar when Arton was there. I wonder if Monsieur Clay knows this house as well as I do! If so, he will have stopped that cellar up. Let us see! Wait there a moment, monsieur,' and Pierre ran rapidly down the dark alley which passed the side of this mysterious habitation.

In a second or two he returned, and I noticed that his voice trembled with excitement as he spoke. 'Come, monsieur, quickly!' he said, and he led me down the alley.

'I fancied I saw a light up there,' he whispered, pointing to a window in the side of the house. 'And I looked in. Can you get up there, monsieur? There is no time to be lost.'

I could indeed see a faint light coming through the bars of the window which he had shown me, and I looked at it eagerly. It was about thirteen or fourteen feet from the ground, but in front of it there was a wall running round the house at a distance
of only a few feet, and I saw that with a little agility it could be managed.

'Yes, I can get up there,' I said.

'Mount, then,' said Pierre, quickly. 'They are quarrelling, I fancy, and it can only end in one way. I am going to try the cellar route. I think the rat won't have closed his hole. Stay there on the wall till I get in. But if you see anything going to happen before I can manage it, break the glass—call out—anything to stop them!' and he was gone.

I sprang on to the wall—fortunately I can draw myself up to any height where I can get a hold for my fingers—and found my eyes on a level with the window.

I looked in, my breath coming fast with excitement and the exertion of my climb. It was an empty room—empty as far as furniture or hangings were concerned—that I gazed into. In a corner, huddled up against the wall on the bare floor, crouched Durand. His face was bruised and discoloured with his recent struggle, and he was bound tightly round his arms and breast with a thick rope. Opposite him stood Clay with a revolver in his hand, which he fingered lightly, ever and again
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turning the barrel half maliciously, as it seemed, towards the crouching figure on the floor.

I could see that the man was still as devilishly cool as ever, yet as I glanced at Durand I could but wonder at his enemy's *sang-froid*, for, indeed, at that moment Madeleine's brother was terrible to behold. His face was purple through the bruises and blood that discoloured it, and his eyes, bloodshot and crimson, glared like those of some fierce wild beast from Clay to the Golden Lotus which lay shining on the ground at his feet, and back again to Clay, ceaselessly. The ropes were strained almost to bursting across his huge chest, and each moment I fancied he must break them and spring upon his tormentor.

Clay was speaking now. I could hear his voice cold and clear even through the glass of the window which separated us.

'Yes, you defied us, my friend Durand! and you thought you could trick us, but your hour has come! We are alone here in this house—the street is a quiet one, and I fancy few people will hear the shot which will send you to follow Roger. Roger's heir? Ha! ha! Have you
nothing to say before you go? No last wishes? No disposition of the Lotus to make—eh? No? Ah! well, that little jewel shall go back now to India. It has been unlucky to you people, so far, hasn't it, Durand? Come, little Golden Lotus! you won't hurt me, I know, for I come to take you back to your friends!'

He stepped quickly forward and snatched the glittering gem from almost beneath Durand's eyes, and then, rising, turned his revolver towards the prostrate man.

The moment had come, and flinging myself forward, I smashed the glass with my fist. Clay started, and Durand's blood-shot eyes turned for a moment towards me, but I saw no gleam of recognition in their distended pupils.

'You villain!' I cried wildly to Clay. 'Would you murder him? Take care!' With my feet still on the wall, and clinging to the bars I tugged at them furiously. But they were firm, and I could not move them.

Clay for a second watched my efforts keenly, then he gave a cold laugh. 'Ah! my other friend! mademoiselle's friend, eh? Well, "monsieur, mademoiselle's friend," you
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are too late! Besides, you are helpless there anyway. You should have come up by the stairs! Ay, shout away! I shall have time to finish before you attract any attention in this neighbourhood. But take care you don't make me angry. I shall have a shot or two left.' And he turned again to Durand.

But his attention had been diverted too long. With a convulsive effort of all his great frame Durand had snapped the ropes that bound him, and with a hoarse cry he flung himself upon Clay. In a second the revolver was sent spinning across the room and Clay was lifted high into the air and dashed senseless to the ground. But Durand, foaming at the lips, seized again the body of his enemy, and now to all appearances insane with rage, commenced to shake it as a terrier worries a rat. Suddenly, however, he ceased, and with a moan commenced to fumble wildly with his collar, his breathing became hoarse and stertorous, and with an exclamation he staggered and fell back against the wall.

I wrenched vainly at the bars of the window and called loudly for Pierre, but
no help came, and even as Durand sank down, Clay opened his eyes. They fell upon the revolver in the corner of the room, and with a gasp he commenced to drag himself slowly and painfully towards it.

For a moment, paralysed, I watched this man crawling like some vicious and wounded animal towards his senseless enemy, and then, mad with fear and helpless rage, I tore frantically at the bars. My emotions must have endowed me with extra force, for at last, to my joy, they yielded, and dashing them from their frame I pulled myself up and leaped into the room.

Clay had the revolver now, and I had only time to spring between the two men before he fired. At that moment Pierre burst into the apartment, and taking in the situation with the speed of thought, he snatched the smoking pistol from Clay's hands.

'Thank God! you've come, Pierre!' I cried wildly. 'I—I feel faint.'

He strode towards me with an exclamation and put his arm round me. 'Mon Dieu, monsieur, you are shot!' he cried.
TRAGEDY

'The Golden Lotus—there—Clay—tell Mdlle. Durand...' I murmured faintly, and then the room swung round with me and I lost consciousness for the second time that night.
CHAPTER XX

THE CLOUDS ARE BREAKING

My wound from the bullet which Clay had intended should reach Durand, added to the effects of the blow on the head given me by the barrière bullies in the cemetery, kept me in my bed for several long weeks, and during the greater part of the time I lay unconscious of the events taking place around me.

It seemed to me, however, even in my delirium, that sometimes a soft hand smoothed my brow and a well-remembered face, with its beautiful dark eyes, gazed down upon me in pity. But so many strange dreams came to me during that time—my brain was haunted by so many images, and most of them images of horror or bloodshed—that when at last I had sufficiently recovered my strength to look about me with conscious eyes, and to
question clearly concerning my surroundings, I was hardly surprised that I saw no signs of Madeleine Durand’s presence there.

However, the first person whom I did see—with the exception of the hospital nurse who appeared to be in attendance upon me—brought the memory of Durand’s sister very vividly to my brain. It was Doctor Louvet, the kind old physician of the Avenue D’Antin, who came to me one morning, after my first return to sensibility, and congratulated me on my progress to convalescence.

‘We shall soon have you about again,’ he said cheerily. ‘You have had a bad time of it. The medicine I prescribed for you on a former occasion would have been of little use to you, I assure you, on this. Ah, well, I wondered that you never came back to tell me if I had done you good,’ and the old gentleman smiled knowingly.

‘You did me good indeed that time, doctor,’ I replied. ‘You helped me to make an acquaintance which . . . but, Doctor Louvet, haven’t you a prescription for me this time?’

‘How do you like your nurse?’ he asked, by way of reply.
‘She seems very kind and attentive,’ I replied rather carelessly.

‘Do you think she has brought you round well—under my supervision?’

‘Yes, certainly, very well. I am very much obliged to her and you.’

‘Well, you need not be! For it was not her at all. She has only been here for the last three days—since, in fact, your recovery has been assured. You had a much more devoted nurse, I assure you.’

I sprang up in my bed. ‘Not Mlle.—not—?’

‘A young lady who declares that you gave your life for her brother’s—or rather that you attempted to, for the poor fellow did not recover.’

‘Durand is dead?’

‘Yes. And the man who shot you too. He lingered—Monsieur Clay—for a little while, but that Durand must have been a terrible fellow. He had absolutely crushed the other to pieces. It was as if a wild animal had worried him.’

‘Indeed, I think that the poor fellow was insane at the time, and unconscious of what he did,’ I said, pondering over the news Doctor Louvet brought me. ‘It
was out of my power to interfere sooner or I should have done so, rather than allow that man Clay to meet such a fearful end. But, as a matter of fact, it was the life or death of one of them. They were equally determined.'

'Yes. I have heard some of the story through Guerin and the evidence he gave,' said Doctor Louvet; 'and through my connection with the police, too, for I am consulting physician to the Force.'

I looked up. 'Tell me,' I said, 'has Mdlle. Durand’s name been mentioned in the affair?'

'Not in any way. Guerin told me that Monsieur Durand had been decoyed into an empty house, and that you two exerted yourselves to effect his rescue. There was no mention of mademoiselle’s name.' The old doctor looked at me keenly, but he said no more on the subject, and I did not question him further, for the nurse entered the room at that moment and the daily dressing of my wound commenced.

'May I see Pierre Guerin, doctor?' I asked, as he was leaving. 'I should very much like to.'

'Why, yes, I think you may. I will tell
him when I see him. He asks after you every day. He is a brave fellow, that, Monsieur Carlton, and has done all that he could for Mdlle. Durand in her grief at the loss of her brother, helping her through many of the necessary troubles and anxieties of such a time.' And the good physician made his way out.

Clay and Durand both dead! Poor Madeleine! her grief at her brother's death must have been great, I felt, but the thought came to me that it was better as it was, and that at least, in the end, she would feel it so. After all she had known but little of him, and his later appearance had certainly not brought her pleasure. And Clay was dead too, eh?' Where was the Golden Lotus? I wondered. I longed to see Pierre. Had he given Madeleine the jewel? or had he feared to do so, knowing the danger which followed ever in its train? Yet Madeleine, I felt, must have the Golden Lotus, for she was poor now, poorer than ever, and over her would hang the shadow of her brother's sin and debts. My task of helping her was not complete until she should have benefited by the treasure which had been so dearly bought.
THE CLOUDS ARE BREAKING


It was not long, indeed, before Pierre did arrive, but I think he delayed his coming for another twenty-four hours, all Madeleine’s and Doctor Louvet’s care of me would have been wasted, and I should again have relapsed into delirium.

I grasped his hand feverishly when he came to my bedside, looking pityingly on the wreck that the last few weeks had made of me.

‘Pierre! where is Mdlle. Durand?’ I asked.

‘Ah, monsieur, you have had a bad bout of it. Thank Heaven you are recovered, though! Mdlle. Durand? Ah, yes, mademoiselle is well. She is still in her rooms at Montmartre.’

‘Alone!’

‘Ah, no, monsieur! She had little Lizette with her—Mdlle. Lizette, I should say—ah, what a young lady that is! What prettiness! What gaiety! She keeps Mdlle. Durand from brooding, she—’

I stopped Pierre in his enthusiasm over Lizette, who appeared to have made a considerable impression on him. ‘How is
she living? How are they living, Pierre? Is she well?'

'Well, monsieur, quite well, but sad! Ah, she is sad, monsieur, and it is not to be wondered at. But they have work now. I have a cousin who is manager at the Bon Marché, and I have contrived to get them some work which they can do in their apartment, and which Mdrlle. Lizette can carry backwards and forwards.'

'Thanks, Pierre,' I returned, 'you have been kind! I shall never forget your help all through this business. But the Golden Lotus? What have you done with the jewel?'

'It is safe, monsieur. I have been waiting for you to recover and decide what to do about it. The jewel is mademoiselle's now, but peste! it is a present of doubtful value to give to a young lady, eh? The people who want that diamond—*Mon Dieu!* what a diamond!—they do not stop at trifles!'

'So Clay is dead?'

'Yes, monsieur. After we had seen Monsieur Durand die—an agent of police fortunately arrived on the scene, attracted by the shot which wounded you—we carried
you home—it seemed safe to take you to your rooms—and we sent for Doctor Louvet. There was nothing to be done for Clay. He was crushed, literally crushed, monsieur; indeed, how he reached that revolver and fired it I do not know.'

'You saw him, then?'

'Yes, I saw nearly all that happened. I was breaking the door open. It was fastened tightly, and I had to smash the panels.'

I stared. I had been too excited with watching that terrible struggle, and my own efforts to intervene in it, even to hear Pierre at the door.

'At all events, you arrived just in time for me, I fancy,' I said. 'I think I owe you my life, Pierre!'

'Well, monsieur, another shot might have certainly done your business! But I blame myself, nevertheless, for not getting into the room sooner. Well, monsieur, Clay, the dark Englishman, was taken to the Bicetre Hospital. I went to see him there once or twice, for the poor fellow seemed to have no friends and was dying alone. Ah, monsieur, there was a fine man wasted there! though I fancy he was a
sad scoundrel. Mon Dieu! he could laugh on his death-bed. He was cool to the last. He used to make fun of me, calling me Fouché and Lecocq, and chuckling over the way they routed us in the graveyard that night; and he wanted to know what had become of the Golden Lotus.

"Tell me, Fouché," he said to me one day before the end, "how is the gentleman I shot by accident and the young lady he is so interested in? I am sorry I shot him, Fouché. I hate doing things by accident. But tell him from me that the young lady need fear nothing now, that—when I am dead— But stay! I will write to him."

"You cannot write, monsieur," I said; "in your state it is impossible!"

'He laughed one of those laughs of his. "Ah, Lecocq," he said, "you want to write for me; you wish to see what I say, do you? Ah, well, you won't. I will get someone else to help me. Or I will write myself, a line a day. I have five or six days to live, and six lines will say what I want. Yes, I will write to him myself, Fouché."'

'He said he would write to me, Pierre?' I asked in surprise.
'Yes, monsieur, and when I saw him again he declared that he had written.'
'I have had no letters from him, or indeed from anyone!' I said anxiously.
'Perhaps the doctor ordered the letters to be kept back,' said Pierre. 'He may have feared for your health.'
'I am better, Pierre,' I said eagerly. 'I am well now! Besides, if I worry I shall certainly get worse. Go and see if Madame Lefort has any letters for me, there's a good fellow! There may even be one from . . . there may be good news for me, and there can certainly not be bad.'

Pierre, a little dubiously, consented, and he returned in a few moments with a couple of envelopes. I felt my heart beat wildly as I saw that one of them was in the handwriting that had inscribed 'Lancelot's Letter' on that strange romance which had brought all this about, and with an exclamation of joy I tore it open.
'Monsieur will like to be alone?' said Pierre, watching my face. 'I will return some other time,' and he left me.

'Dear Mr Carlton'—began Madeleine's letter—'I am so glad, so very glad, that
you are recovering. Doctor Louvet, who has been most kind, tells me that it is so, and that a few weeks will see you quite well again. Ah! I cannot tell you how I feel for you—how cruel I think this accident! That you should have been wounded while so nobly trying to save my poor brother! Monsieur Guerin has told me how it all happened. Poor Lancelot! he lost his life uselessly. Ah! Mr Carlton, I fear he has been to blame; but I feel that he was sorry for what he had done in Colombo. I know that only in great distress could he have been persuaded to forget what was right so fearfully as he did, and I think that this last rash attempt was to a certain extent due to a wish to give me happiness. Monsieur Guerin told me he died with my name on his lips. What is so dreadful is that you should have suffered too, and cruelly. I hope you will come, when you are better, and see Lizette and myself. Monsieur Guerin has been so kind as to get some work from the Bon Marché for us, and we are very busy.—Believe me, sincerely yours,

'Madeleine Durand.'
THE CLOUDS ARE BREAKING

Ah! Madeleine, my darling! not for much longer should you have to work those pretty fingers of yours and rely for help even upon such estimable people as Lizette and Pierre Guerin. Only let me get well and . . . My thoughts turned to the other letter on the bed—Clay's letter. What had he to say, and in connection with the subject of my thoughts?

I opened the letter. It ran thus, commencing without any usual preamble:

'I am sorry I shot you. My only excuse is that I was not quite myself at the time, and it was an accident. Your friend—your late friend—was hasty-tempered, and I daresay we were all at the moment slightly exalté. I would have killed him if I could. I would kill him now if he had not chanced to die by a visitation of God, as we may call it, for he was playing fast and loose with me, and I merely was doing my work which I was engaged to do. Now to pay you back for your accident, and also for giving you a moment or two's uneasiness about the heart, eh? one night in the neighbourhood of Montrouje. You have got the Golden
Lotus. Well, you, or rather she, can keep it now. With a confidence in my own powers, which was justified by the past, but which in this affair deceived me, I kept all the strings in my own hands. When I die, as I shall die before the week is out, the fate of the Golden Lotus will vanish in a mystery which the people who employed me will never fathom. They do not even know that my search ever led me to Paris. Better pay Carter's bill, though. Sing won't do anything without hearing from me, and that he will never do now until we meet in Hell, where we are both going—I with a bit the best of the start! Excuse me if this letter is not quite coherent. I am badly knocked about. Smash the gold-work of that jewel into unrecognisable fragments and sell the diamond for the benefit of that beautiful heroine whom I was obliged to shadow once. If it is any consolation to you to know it, she is a young lady who should make you an exceptional wife, and I ought to know something of her, eh? That cupboard, you know! Lucky man! Good heavens! if I had your start in life again! Sell that diamond. It wouldn't do to flash it
about, you know. It won't bring anyone luck! I could tell you a story, but I haven't time. Shake old Fouché by the hand. He is a good chap, He is the only person who has been to see me here. Queer, isn't it, with all the friends I have?'

So Madeleine, unless the writer of this letter was deceiving me, would be a rich woman! I remembered this man as I had seen him first, strong and handsome in his wicked way. I remembered him as I had seen him crawling like some wounded snake towards the revolver on the floor, while Durand lay helpless and unconscious at his mercy; and I thought of him dying alone in the hospital, and writing to me who had been his enemy, and I sighed in spite of myself. What a waste of good material for men goes on in this world—what a waste! But I suppose the gods have no lack of material!

And now to get well.
CHAPTER XXI

SUNSHINE

That 'getting well' was a long business, for the wounds I had received were dangerous ones, but, like everything else, it was accomplished in time.

Convalescent at last. My first visit, as may be imagined, was to Mdlle. Durand at the little rooms in Montmartre, and, as the excuse for my journey, I took with me, the Golden Lotus, lying snugly, and, to look at, innocent of all the tragedies its long life had known, in my coat pocket, with one hand clasping it firmly all the time.

I had had the idea that, being a woman, perhaps Madeleine would be curious to see the wonderful diamond which was now hers, and of which she had heard so much; but when I saw her again, pale and sad, working humbly in companionship with her little grisette friend, when I saw the grief which
SUNSHINE

her brother's death had marked upon her young face, and heard her speak of the events which had led up to that terrible night, I changed my resolution, and contented myself with informing her of my possession, and inquiring her wishes on the subject.

'Do as you please, Mr Carlton,' she said, shuddering. 'If it brings enough to pay my brother's debts and clear his name, and you say there is no danger to you in attempting to sell it, do so. But never ask me to look at it—never recall it to me—never speak to me of it. I would rather work here all my life with Lizette, I would rather starve, than ever have anything to do with that horrible—that fatal—bequest of that poor murdered soldier.'

Her speech did but make my plans the easier to carry out, and after a short visit, in which I had all my energies taxed to prevent the two women turning me into a hero for my wounds,—received after all in so very unheroic a manner,—I left them and walked to the British Embassy.

It happened that Lauford had a brother there, one of the young attachés, and he had chanced to introduce me to this gentleman
one morning, and we had met occasionally since.

'Well, Carlton, I heard you were ill. I hope you are all right again,' he said, as we strolled down the flagged path from the Embassy to the big gates into the Rue St Honore. 'By Jove, you are pulled down! But what can I do for you? You say you want a favour done. Not a marriage license, eh?'

'Not just yet,' I returned, laughing. 'That may come, however. What I want is an introduction.'

'An introduction? Oh, to La Gennari? That's what all the fellows want nowadays?'

'No. I don't know the lady by sight even. I want an introduction to a jeweller—a diamond merchant.'

'If it were a jeweller's shop, now, La Gennari would do as well, but . . . I shouldn't have thought it of you, Carlton! Diamonds on credit! By Jove! I am not sure whether my name will serve you after all. The chief's might, though he's been . . . but let me see! Diamonds? . . .'

'I want to sell one,' I said, laughing in spite of myself at his tone.
'I'll buy it, if it is a good one and you don't want ready money.'

'I do, and with all respect to you, I think this particular stone would be beyond you, unless you happen to have forty or fifty thousand pounds to spend . . .'

'Good Lord! forty thousand pounds! Why, you must have been in the Cape the last few weeks.'

'It is not mine: it belongs to a . . . a friend. That is why I want a good introduction—an introduction backed up by the weight of Her Majesty's Embassy.'

Laurence Lauford looked at me quizzingly. 'Well, you are a good-looking fellow enough, Carlton, but I should hardly have thought a princess would have entrusted you with the selling of her diamonds. A friend, eh? But don't mind my chaff! Come inside and I'll write you a line to old Frère in the Rue de la Paix. He'll do your business for you. Tell him you are a very dear friend of mine, will you? A man who has forty-thousand-pounder diamonds to sell is not found every day.'

I made my way with the introduction back to my rooms; and with a hammer I detached the setting of the Golden Lotus
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

from the stone, half regretting the necessity of the action as I did so. Then, wrapping up the wonderful glittering gem carefully, I retraced my steps to the Rue de la Paix.

Monsieur Frère was at home, one of the shopmen informed me, and sending in my line of introduction I was presently ushered into a little private room at the back of his well-known shop.

A little dark man with a southern accent, but speaking English perfectly, rose from an easy chair and bowed to me on my entrance.

'Mr Carlton?' he said graciously. 'What can I do for you? My time is at your service.'

'You are very kind,' I returned. 'I have a diamond I wish to dispose of.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said the little man, carelessly. 'I shall be pleased to see it—and I hope we shall agree about the price.'

'I hope so,' I said, rather smiling to myself, as my hand in my pocket grasped the yellow gem of the Lotus. 'I hope so, Monsieur Frère, but this is rather a large stone.'

Monsieur Frère laughed as if I had made
a very good joke. 'Is it anything like these?' and going to a safe he took out a loose handful of precious stones and rattled them carelessly on the table. At any other period in my life I should have stared aghast at their beauty and the rashness with which he handled them; but at that moment I was not to be moved. I felt like a poker player with a royal flush. Even four aces were no use to me.

'Yes,' I said, with a smile, 'those are wonderful stones, but I am not a judge, to tell the truth. But the diamond which I have to sell is rather a special stone.'

Mr Frère stared at me for a moment. Then he picked up one of the largest of his stones. 'Better than this?' he asked.

'I should say better than a dozen of those,' I said quietly.

Monsieur Frère sat down rather staggered. 'Will you let me look at this wonderful gem, Mr Carlton?' he said humbly.

I took the Golden Lotus's yellow centre from my pocket and pushed it towards him across the table, while he stared at it, his eyes growing larger and larger as it approached him. Then, without even touching it, he
placed his face in his hands and tugged at his hair violently.

'Ah, monsieur, you have humbled me truly!' he murmured. 'Ah! unfortunate that I am! I cannot buy this—this regal stone. Last week I could have said—let me see! Ten—twenty—and four thousand—and—yes, monsieur! last week I could have done it. But last week I bought a château in Languedoc, and—misérable that I am, I am now too poor!'

I looked at him surprised. 'I am sorry,' I said at last. 'Can you give me the name of someone who could do so, then. I am rather pressed for time, and—'

'Mr Carlton,' he said suddenly, 'there is not another jeweller in Paris who could buy that stone. I have friends—stay, will you wait here a quarter of an hour? I will return,' and taking up his hat he dashed from the room.

I stared in amazement as I noticed that he had left me alone with the little heap of precious stones on the table; but I had not the slightest doubt that in all probability there was a watchful eye upon me somewhere, and I sat with my hands in my pockets quietly awaiting his return,
and fearful that if I moved my intentions might be misinterpreted.

As I sat my eyes fixed themselves on the Golden Lotus, and I could not help wondering how I should have felt had that jewel not been Madeleine's. By Frère's frank confession of his inability to purchase it — this man who bought châteaux in Languedoc—the stone must be even more valuable than I had thought it. Had it been some mere acquaintance who had entrusted me with the gem, should I have been tempted, I wondered, by such a fortune? But Madeleine's? This fortune would be Madeleine's, and even when her brother's debts were paid she must still be a rich woman. Would that fact change her — change her towards me? I wondered. I should be poor compared to her...

The door opened and Monsieur Frère, with many apologies for keeping me waiting, entered. He was smiling now joyously, and he rubbed his hands together eagerly as he introduced me to another man who had followed him quietly into the room. 'Monsieur Wiels — Mr Carlton,' he said, introducing us.

I looked at the newcomer with interest.
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

He was a little, shabbily-dressed man about fifty, with a skin yellow and wrinkled into a thousand creases, and wide, blue, innocent-looking eyes.

He bowed to me awkwardly, and then flew to the table. With a careless sweep of his dried hand he brushed Frère's heap of stones aside and seized the Golden Lotus, weighing it, poring over it, breathing on to it, caressing it with little exclamations. Presently he looked up quickly. 'I will give—we will give—sixty-five thousand pounds sterling for this stone,' he said shortly. 'Had there not been that last drop in the price of diamonds, I, even I, could not have bought it.'

I kept my countenance as well as I could, and pretended to hesitate. 'I will take seventy,' I said quietly.

Monsieur Frère started forward. 'Monsieur Carlton, they know me at your Embassy. I am an honest man! I guarantee my friend, Monsieur Wiel's, good faith... I...' 'I will give sixty-eight—not a penny more,' interrupted Wiel, harshly. 'And I will write you a cheque now. Frère will go and get you the money while you wait.'
And he drew a cheque-book from his pocket.

I nodded. I was not equal to bargaining in tens of thousands. I felt as if the diamond might shrivel up while I hesitated.

'I will accept your offer,' I said quickly.

Monsieur Wiels scribbled the cheque, and Frère, with a sigh of relief, dashed from the room.

Monsieur Wiels turned to me, his wide, blue eyes undisturbed by the approaching disappearance of so much money. 'A wonderful stone, monsieur,' he said. 'Has it a history?'

'It has a very—very terrible history,' I said. 'But it is not mine; and I am not at liberty to tell it.'

'Ah, that is a pity. I thought I recognised the gem at first, but it is not so. This particular stone was cut in India, let me see, over a thousand years ago at least.'

'Really,' I said, turning rather pale. 'How interesting!' I was beginning to wish Frère would return. This little man made me nervous, and I was wondering whether he wouldn't tell me next where the Golden Lotus came from last. How-
ever, fortunately, he drifted into a dis-
quision on Frère's diamonds, and pre-
sently the latter returned and I was forced,
with a whirling brain, to turn my attention
to counting out sixty-eight thousand pounds
in hundred-pound Bank of England notes,
which Frère had courteously provided in
honour of my nationality.

'I would not take a fiacre,' said Monsieur
Frère, smiling, as I buttoned my coat care-
fully over the bundle of paper. 'And I
would be careful of the crossings. Good-
day, Monsieur Carlton, and many thanks.'

I bowed to the two men, who turned
again to discuss the Golden Lotus, and
with one last glance at that strange jewel
I left it behind me for ever. My experi-
ence of it had, at least, been lucky. I
hoped theirs would be, and I wondered if
they would sleep peacefully to-night if they
knew all that I knew concerning it.

I made my way as quickly as possible,
with the bundle of notes already weighing
on my mind, in the direction of Madeleine's
rooms.

When I climbed the long stairs and
tapped at the little door on the fifth land-
ing, my heart was beating fast, and the
sight of Madeleine standing in the passage made it throb still more wildly. When she preceded me into the little bare sitting-room I saw that she was alone; and as I marked the little heap of work on the table, and felt the chilliness of the room, relieved only by the little mass of charcoal in the stove, I smiled to myself at the news I brought.

‘Mdlle. Durand,’ I said, ‘I have been so fortunate as to sell your jewel—the Golden Lotus. I don’t know whether I have got all that I ought to have got for it; but you must forgive me if I am a bad business man. The price was sixty-eight thousand pounds.’

‘Sixty-eight thousand pounds!’ gasped Mdlle. Durand, turning white.

‘Yes. See, here are the notes,’ and I took the bundle from my pocket.

To my dismay Madeleine burst into tears and buried her face in her hands.

I flung the notes on the table, and involuntarily I sank on my knees and took her hand.

She did not withdraw her fingers, and looked up at me with tear-stained eyes.

‘Then Lancelot—poor Lancelot’s name
THE GOLDEN LOTUS

will be cleared,' she murmured. 'Ah! how good Heaven is. But are you sure, Mr Carlton?'

'Quite,' I returned. 'And you will still be a rich woman. Ah! Madeleine, forgive me! I wish it was not so! I wish that your brother had permitted me to help him.'

'Ah! he told me of your goodness.'

'Mdlle. Durand! it was no goodness! It was selfishness, I fear. It was for you I did it. It was your smile, your happiness I wanted to win. Forgive me! I love you; I have loved you since that night when—Listen, Madeleine, I saw you. I, too, spied on you. It was an accident. Can you forgive me? I saw you return that night with terror in your lovely eyes; I saw you kneel in prayer beneath that crucifix, and I loved you then. I have loved you since with a love that has only grown stronger as I have known you better, seen your courage, your noble life. Have I any hope, Madeleine—have I any hope? You are a rich woman now, richer far than I . . . .' 

She interrupted me. 'But I can never touch that money,' she said.
'And I cannot keep it,' I said, smiling, for her eyes were lowered, and her fingers lay in mine warm and tender. 'Or stay—you need not touch it, Madeleine. I will risk being thought a fortune-hunter. I will keep it for you—if—I will you say yes?'

My story is finished. Lancelot Durand's debts were paid and his name cleared, As Carter had become reconciled to his father, no proceedings in connection with the forged bill were ever taken, and I paid the money for Madeleine and destroyed the proof of his sin. After her brother's liabilities were disposed of, Madeleine was still an heiress; but with her permission her fortune was still further diminished by the money requisite to start Pierre Guerin and Lizette—who had followed our example and become engaged, thereby, I imagine, leaving the fat chef Joseph free to attract Pierre's buxom housekeeper's attention—in business as proprietors of a distinguished maison de robes.

We heard no more of the former owners of the Golden Lotus, and probably Doctor Clay was sincere when he assured me that
with his death would disappear all trace of that once fatal treasure. I never heard either of Messieurs Frère or Wiels being subjected to any annoyance through their purchase of the yellow stone, which I believe now shines on the bosom of a rather notorious Russian, and is having a much livelier time than it must have had either in the grave at Montrouge, or even in its home at Madura. Though I believe, if report speaks truly, that its present shrine has almost as many worshippers.

THE END
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