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on the wall, and then gravely sat down opposite her.

"I regret that you should have gone to the trouble of ordering dinner," said Lady Herbert; "I shall be obliged to leave within the hour."

"Madame is evidently new to this kind of meetings," remarked the young man.

Lady Herbert admitted that she was; that this was an entirely new experience for her; that she wasn't half disappointed, though.

"Perhaps Madame will grant me a further interview," continued the young man, with a deference and decorum Lady Herbert could hardly understand. She felt no strangeness, albeit the sense of the oddity of the occasion was not lacking.

The man whose face she was now studying had dark blue eyes, extremely blond hair, aquiline features and a well-bred air. His hands were small, well formed and cared for. He was not dressed for dinner, but wore morning clothes of fashionable cut.

"Madame is of the *haut ton*," he observed. "What has induced her to act so indiscreetly?—for is it not an indiscretion to meet an adventurer like myself?"

Lady Herbert smiled at his honesty. "I have always had the reputation of being eccentric," she replied; "but who can tell of the pleasure this chance meeting may give me?"

"Madame must not forget that it is purely and simply a matter of *quid pro quo*. As Madame is known to me—and the wealth of her husband is such that a few thousands would be but a mere bagatelle—I must request a slight payment before we part," remarked the young stranger, rather abruptly.

Lady Herbert turned very pale beneath her complexion. "Oh, a blackmailing scheme," she answered, her voice not betraying a tremor.

"As you please to call it," he replied, "although the term sounds harsh."

"How came you to learn my identity?" she coolly demanded.

"As you stepped from your carriage one of two men passing remarked, 'There's the roan I sold Sir Peter Herbert.' When you entered the restaurant I asked your coachman if your ladyship was dining here. He vouchsafed me no reply. Turning on my heel I caught sight of the crest on the panel of the door. It interests me—the crest of Sir Peter Herbert!"

Lady Herbert was a cold-blooded, calculating, clever woman of the world, designing, reckless and daring. She had been in worse positions. *Coute que coute*, she would have excitement; really, this was growing interesting.

"You are indeed clever, my young friend; and were I young and unsophisticated your mysterious manner might well overawe me. I am always ready to pay the reckoning, and, so far as the entertainment goes, I will willingly pay you to prevent any *esclandre*. But tell me why the crest on my carriage door excites your interest?"

The young man threw off his frock-coat and rolled up his shirt sleeve. On the biceps of his arm was tattooed the crest of Sir Peter Herbert—a lion rampant, holding a crescent between his

paws.

"Isn't it odd?" exclaimed her ladyship; "pray, how do you account for it?" "Ravelle put it there," said the mysterious young man.

"And who is Ravelle?" asked Lady Herbert.

"Ravelle was king of the swell mob. Some say he was my father. He always treated me well, and he gave me his savings—the savings of years—the night he was brought home dying—stabbed by some unknown assassin."

"Do go on," replied her ladyship. "Really, London is not half dead yet; I never expected romance in such a meeting."

The young man helped himself to the ruffles and replenished the glasses.

"With the money left me by Ravelle I have managed to exist; but professional pride chiding, I have sought to make a mark among my fellows by entangling and entrapping game like your ladyship—in fact, any well known and wealthy woman."

"There is no slow music or pizzicato," dryly observed her ladyship; "the orchestra in the restaurant below is playing two-four time; but tell me, do you remember your early childhood?"

"I remember woods," answered the strange young man, dreamily and solemnly; "I remember woods and a park, and dark swarthy men, one of whom took me up in his arms and fled, while the other struggled with a woman who tried to follow."

"My son!" exclaimed her ladyship, lighting fresh cigarette.

"Mother!" cried the strange young man, with rare business acumen.

"I can now explain the tattooing on your arm," said her ladyship. "All your underwear, as a child, had Sir Peter's crest stamped on it. Ravelle, the man who stole you, destroyed the clothes, but gave you instead that indelible impression—the secret of your birth."

"Ye," eagerly gasped the strange young man.

"You are my son, and I—oh, happy woman that I am—your mother!" concluded her ladyship with a burst of laughter.

The strange young man bit his lip and knitted his eyebrows.

"Well and good, Lady Herbert; but this escapade must be paid for," he said angrily. "At least a pony for tonight—until we meet again, Lady Herbert."

Her ladyship drew a £20 note from her portemonnaie and threw it across the table.

The strange young man quickly pocketed it.

Lady Herbert poured out a goblet of champagne and tossed it down in a draught.

"It is really too bad that neither of us can believe this beautiful Drury Lane story," she said, half regretfully. "I love coincidents even if they are contrived, and crests, you know, are awfully common. Yes, Sir Peter did lose a child, stolen at the age of five, some eighteen years ago. Men of your class, clever criminals and blackmailers, make use of the smallest details in perfecting their infamous plots. Permit me to look at your tattooed arm again," and Lady Her-

bert grasped the white flesh firmly with her left hand. Her right hand held her lace handkerchief. With a sudden, deft movement she dipped it in his half filled glass and gave the crest a heavy rub. It came off like court plaster.

He smiled admiringly at her.

"How did you guess?" he asked.

"Merely my artistic perceptions," she replied. "I saw at the first glance that it had been hastily drawn—evidently from an impression in wax made on the door panel. A confederate did the work on your arm by some process known only to yourself. Now, really, how came you to hit upon such a brilliant scheme to find your long-lost mother?"

"The swell mob reads the papers, Lady Herbert," answered the young man, dropping his accent and lapsing into professional *argot*. "We don't drink green milk and we know a float face when the sob breast sings. The story of your child's kidnapping was handed down by Ravelle—he was a deep one—but it was only tonight, when I learned your name, that I thought of playing the long lost child on you. We Jephsons act quickly. No sooner had I and my pal assured ourselves of your identity than the trick was ready to be played. I soon saw what kind of a woman I had to deal with, and relinquished all hope of working the deception on you. However, I can always depend on a generous allowance to keep this little meeting a secret, Lady Herbert—eh?" he asked, impudently.

Lady Herbert had had all the fun she wanted. Her Irish blood began to boil. It was the O'Hara blood, and it ran hot at times.

"You dirty, low lived scoundrel!" she cried, "I would have played you fair and allowed you the twenty pounds for the elaborate pains taken to afford me an hour's amusement, but now I shall see this matter to the bitter end and put you where you belong. Robert!" she screamed.

The door was thrown violently open and Robert rushed in, followed by two men.

"Yes, my lady, and here's some gentlemen from Scotland Yard who have been waiting outside with me."

"This must never get out!" cried her ladyship.

"Trust us for that, my lady," said one of the detectives. "Miss Coster, of the Gaiety, will appear against him. She made an appointment to meet him here to get back a diamond brooch he relieved her of last night. Jim and me have been laying for the rook these ten days past, and Miss Coster was the one to put us on his track. If he wants to get off light he'll never breathe your ladyship's name. This is not his first big play, but it will be his last for five years, at least."

Lady Herbert threw her purse to the officers.

"Divide it between you," she said. Then to Robert. "We dine at 8. Tell John not to spare the horses."

That night at dinner Lady Herbert got off a wretched British joke. "I consider the criminal classes distinctly Sir Giles," she observed.

One of the distinguished company asked her, "Why?"

"Because they Overreach," replied her ladyship.

And Sir Peter laughed with the rest. —The West Ender.

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