

"You are armed, Monsieur?"

"Yes; you anticipate trouble?"

"Hardly that, but it is well to be prepared. I have heard unpleasant stories of the place, and I do not know the exact character of the men you are seeking."

"Brandt has the reputation in Europe of being equal to any expedient to attain his ends," I said quietly. "Perhaps that is why I am rather anxious to cross swords with him. This man Schmitt is an unknown."

"Schmitt! Oh, he will be content with a silent part. There is no danger of his getting in the way of any harm. But there are probably others here under Brandt's orders."

"Likely enough, although he usually prefers to operate alone."

There was a pause during which I glanced aside at the contour of her face through the haze of my cigar.

"Do you regret coming?" I asked finally, almost hoping she did. "For if so we can turn back. Really it is nothing to me; principally a curiosity to see the fellow."

She turned her face up to look at me in surprise.

"I! Why certainly not. You do not understand, Monsieur, the newspaper instinct. This looks to me like a good story, and I wouldn't lose my chance at writing it for the world and getting a scoop."

"Oh, then I am to comprehend your interest is altogether professional, Mademoiselle? That is not flattering."

She laughed, her hand pressing my sleeve.

"It is far better for you to think that than be deceived. Surely you could not expect me to fight to preserve a French secret?"

"My hope was a personal one rather," I ventured recklessly. "That you might have some interest in a Frenchman."

"Why of course I have. I confess I wish you to win; perhaps I may even help you, if I see a way clear; of course," she added mischievously, "if it doesn't endanger my job."

"Your what, Mademoiselle?"

"My position; you must remember this play is about to be staged in the presence of my city editor. It therefore behooves me to act well my part, and preserve a strict neutrality. You must not expect too much."

"But you are more than a reporter."

"You would not think so, if you had to live on my salary."

"That is not my meaning—you are also a woman."

"Why remind me of that misfortune! The newspaper game is the one place where sex is forgotten—except as occasionally good bait for an interview. Oh, no, Monsieur, while I wish you well in this night's adventure, I am to be a non-combatant, to count only as a mere looker on in Vienna!"

As suddenly the light raillery in her voice changed to a tone of seriousness.

"Of course circumstances might arise to cause the woman to overcome the reporter. One never knows, and there are times when I fail to understand myself. Do you speak Spanish, Monsieur?"

"Indifferently; just sufficient to get along in Madrid," I answered, surprised at the quick change. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because there might be occasion for us to exchange words unknown to the

others. If so, remember I speak the tongue. It may prove of value."

"Then you must really mean that I can rely upon you in an emergency."

"I have made no promise; rather it is more the nature of a warning, because you have reminded me that I was more than a reporter. A woman, you know, is a strange combination. This is the Cafe Francois."

Outwardly, at least, the place appeared respectable enough, the front brilliantly lighted, but the interior scene obscured by clouded glass. Besides the main swinging doors, there was a smaller one with "Ladies Entrance" lettered on it, and we entered through this, finding ourselves in a narrow hall, leading directly to a rear room. This, while evidently not the main dining-hall, was sufficiently large and commodious, containing tables of varying sizes prepared for guests, and a few booths arranged for privacy. Many of the tables were occupied, and noise and loud voices proclaimed the presence of a convivial set. A piano played furiously, and on one side of the room, in a vacant space, a few couples were dancing.

"Table, sir?"

"Yes," the lady answered for me. "The small one next the wall, please."

As we were being seated, and the waiter left us to find a printed menu, she leaned across to whisper swiftly:

"We must order something—any trifle, with drinks. Our party is at the next table to the right. Don't look; let them make the first move."

I glanced at them as I scanned the bill, ordering a salad with a bottle of champagne. There were, somewhat to my surprise, four in the party, two unmistakably German, the others not so easily classified. Directly fronting us, and hence facing the door, was a tall, rather cadaverous person, with iron-gray hair, hollow cheeks, and light-colored mustache, his blue eyes partly concealed by heavy glasses. Mentally I decided this must be Schmitt, although he was hardly the type I anticipated. Beside him sat a younger man, very debonair in appearance, with red cheeks, and pink and white complexion. He was doing most of the talking, describing some incident on shipboard in excellent English, while the others, apparently interested in his recital, were leaning forward, forgetful of their meal. The faces of the two with backs toward me were hidden, but one was large, with almost colossal shoulders, and a dark beard closely trimmed. I noticed how upright he sat in his chair in contradistinction to the other, a small sandy-haired fellow with waxed mustache, and long, thin neck. I contented myself with a single glance, deciding instantly that the larger individual was Brandt, and feeling only slight interest in the others. He was the one to watch and fear, and I knew instinctively he was likely to prove himself no mean antagonist. I remember feeling amused at the soberness of Miss Probyn's watchful eyes as my gaze returned to her face. The adventure was beginning to be entertaining, and I was already confident enough of its final outcome to feel slightly amused.

"Do you recognize the others?" I asked softly.

She shook her head negatively; then said slowly in Spanish.

"Do you understand? Yes; then listen, but do not answer in English. The younger man is a reporter on one of the German papers, but I have never before seen the fellow sitting beside Brandt. Has Schmitt appeared to notice me yet?"

"No; he is listening to the story."

"All make-believe; the whole four saw us when we came in. They will begin the game in a minute. Don't be surprised at anything I may do, Monsieur, and keep your eyes and ears open."

We sat there sipping our wine, and conversing carelessly. As her back was toward the other table, I easily kept them in view, but could observe no sign that we had been recognized. Finally the German reporter excused himself and withdrew, passing our table without so much as a glance, yet he had scarcely disappeared before Schmitt stepped across the narrow aisle and spoke to my companion.

"Why, Miss Probyn," he exclaimed, his slight foreign accent barely perceptible. "This is the last place I would expect to meet you. However, all the greater pleasure," and he extended his hand, smiling genially behind his glasses. "You have met Captain Brandt? No! Oh, then permit me—Captain Brandt, Miss Probyn, and—ah, Herr Franzen, of Berlin, Miss Probyn—old friends from the Fatherland, indulging in reminiscences, inspired by the national beverage," and he swept a glance over the half-emptied steins littering the table. "Germans are Germans the world over, you know. I—I think I have never met your friend."

She was standing facing them, and I also arose to my feet.

"My friend," she said pleasantly, "happens to be traveling incognito, so names do not count for much—Mr. Gray, of Boston, gentlemen."

Brandt was the picture of courtesy, bowing politely, while not a change of expression appeared on his somewhat stolid face. Schmitt's pale blue eyes sought those of the girl in a swift questioning, but Herr Franzen, his face reddened by drink, was evidently in an ugly mood, and glared at me without acknowledgment.

"Huh!" he snapped, twisting his waxed ends insolently. "Campagne; our new friend must be a millionaire."

"The wine is paid for," I replied, holding my temper, "and another bottle will be ordered if Messieurs will join us?"

"Messieurs! Bah! I smell a Frenchman at the first whiff."

"Be quiet, Franzen," and Brandt gripped the drunken fool none too gently. "Sit down and hold your tongue. Your pardon, Monsieur," and he turned to me smilingly. "This fellow is always most patriotic when sodden with beer, but it is the case of a barking dog. We will join you with pleasure, only I insist on giving the order. Draw up your table next to ours."

Willing enough to permit affairs to shape themselves, I accepted the exchange of places. The lady's eyes flashed warning into mine, but I felt little need of the admonishment. While beyond doubt Franzen had been drinking, yet he was not drunk, but was deliberately exaggerating his condition. For what purpose? Either to throw me off my guard, or else to provoke a quarrel. His insolence was part of a well-conceived plot; these fellows were here with a prearranged plan, a concerted

purpose in view, yet I could only sit quiet watching for the card to be played next. The delay was not a long one, although we conversed idly over the wine, which Franzen, however, refused to touch, leaning back in his chair and glowering across at me. I chose to ignore him utterly, directing my entire conversation to Brandt, whose individuality interested me at once. Here was the man I must measure swords with. Nevertheless I made no attempt to probe the man, contenting myself with the commonplace; it was Miss Probyn, taking advantage of her sex, who ventured personal questions.

"Are you really an officer of the German army, Captain Brandt?" she asked innocently. "I am so interested."

"Not at present—no," he acknowledged frankly. "Indeed, I am seldom called Captain any more except by old comrades. Schmitt here and I served together, but it is ten years since I resigned from the army." His response was in English, scarcely marred by the slightest accent.

"Not in government service then?"

"No," indifferently, yet with a swift glance at her face across the table. "Traveling altogether for pleasure, and renewing old acquaintances."

"In these days I presume you meet with a good many in America," I interposed carelessly.

"They are scattered about everywhere. I ran into Schmitt here merely by accident. Hadn't seen him before for twenty years until yesterday. 'Tis not so with your countrymen, Monsieur—they do not scatter as the Germans."

"Taking it for granted that I am French."

"I supposed that was admitted," laughing. "Really nationality has little weight with me, Monsieur. I have lived under so many flags that I am a true cosmopolitan. Herr Franzen, here, remains intensely patriotic, but I have learned long ago that manhood has no race lines. Am I to understand you desire to remain incognito?"

"Certainly not; that was merely a joke of Miss Probyn's."

"Then it will be my privilege to name you to my friends."

"You recognize me?"

"Of course. I have traveled widely in France, and have even visited the aviation ground at Nice. Your presence in Chicago is no secret, and pictures of you have frequently appeared in the newspapers of Paris and Berlin. I recognized you at once—gentlemen," and he glanced at the others, "the distinguished aviator, Lieutenant Dessaud."

Knowing what I did this byplay was most amusing. I even ventured to smile aside at Miss Probyn, while acknowledging this new introduction with a bow, but the good humor felt did not in the least throw me off my guard. That Brandt was a secret agent, specially detailed to learn all he could relative to my monoplane, was beyond discussion. Directly, or indirectly, the other two men with him, were also interested to the same end. How highly important my discoveries were rated was evidenced by the amount of money already paid Schmitt merely to arrange this apparently accidental meeting. It alone was proof positive that Brandt was prepared to go far to attain his ends. Nor was he one to waste effort. The present

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