THE MISCHIEF MAKER

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTER

Sir Julien Portel, England's secretary of foreign affairs, is forced to resign as the result of an injudicious leter written to the designing wife of his greatest rival. He and a friend, David Kendricks, a newspaper man, are dining just before Portel flees to France, and a mysterious girl gives him a note, asking that he call on a Mme. Christophor in Paris.

He meets Mme. Christophor. A German secret service man, Eugene Esterman, is following him. Mme. Christophor tells him she hates Esterman because he wrecked a girl's life. He repulses Esterman, but finally agrees to meet Esterman's employer, the Prince von Falkenberg, the power behind Germany's throne, who offers Sir Julien work in a distant country. The prince is attempting to form a Franco--German alliance. Sir Julien does not accept, but says he may do so.

The next morning Kendricks says that in England people are saying that Julien is at the bottom of the mystrious influence that seems to be upsetting relations between France and England. Kendricks warns him that it isn't well to be seen in public places with "Herr Freudenberg," the name assumed by Prince von Falkenberg.

In Herr Freudenberg's apartment Esterman is saying that he could not find a document of any importance in Julien's rooms.

Herr Freudenberg gives a luncheon for M. Dechles, M. Felix Brandt and M. Palleman, at which they discuss the fact that Germany and France should be allies instead of France and England.

Sir Julien goes to luncheon at the home if Mme. Christophor. She tells him to beware of the Prince von Falkenberg and suggests that perhaps England may want Sir Julien to return some time. She still is mysterious and refuses to reveal her identity. She exercises a strange charm over Sir Julien.

Kendricks takes Sir Julien to a little German restaurant to show him in what great numbers the Germans are coming into Paris.

The two go to a cafe. In the back room is a meeting of German Socialists. Kendricks has tickets, and, after considerable difficulty, gets past the doorkeeper. The president of the meeting speaks saying that the meeting is held to discuss whether the Prince von Falkenberg shall be assassinated. Slips are passed around. The vote is overwhelmingly in favor of death. One the president reads. It is a protest against the assassination. There is a noise at the rear the lights are turned up, and Falkenberg is recognized standing at the door attempting to escape. Kendricks and Sir Julien rush to his side fight off the enraged Socialists, and help him escape. They also get away safely.

At the Rat Mort the two find Mlle. Ixe, Falkenberg's friend. A moment later he comes himself. Falkenberg and Mlle Ixe are at a table together. He has her bring to the table a M. Jesen, a Parisian newspaper man, and a girl who is with the latter.

Jesen, who is a rather famous writer after much persuasion agrees to write editorials favoring whatever policy Falkenberg suggests if the latter buys Le Jour for him. The deal is made.

BOOK II.

Sir Julien unexpectedly meets Lady Anne, his former fiancee in Paris whither she has fled to escape a distasteful marriage. Following a supper party Hendricks warns Sir Julien not to accept Falkenberg's offer of a foreign mission, declaring it to be a scheme to get rid of him. Instead, Hendricks urges Sir Julien to write a series of articles attacking Falkenberg's policy for publication in England, where Carraby, Sir Julien's successor, already is in hot water through mismanagement of the foreign office.

Madame Christopher tells Sir Julien she is Fraudenberg's (Falkenberg's) wife though separated from him, and warns Sir Julien that his life is in danger. Sir Julien takes Lady Anne to dinner, where they discuss Madame Christopher's offer to employ Lady Anne as her secretary and Sir Julien's first article. They return to Sir Julien's apartments, where Herr Freudenberg calls.

Lady Ann secretes herself in Sir Julien's apartment. After a short talk with Sir Julien, Herr Freudenberg whistles softly. Estermen enters and overpowers Sir Julien. He refuses to drink a potion that he is told will have no further effect than to impair his intellect for a period of time. A worse fate is threatened when Lady Anne comes to the rescue with a loaded revolver. Herr Freudenberg and Estermen retire.

Lady Anne's mother comes to Paris, locates Sir Julien and demands to see Lady Anne. Sir Julien goes to fetch her. At her place of employment he proposes marriage. Lady Anne declines.

Lady Anne sees her mother and again refuses to marry Sir Julien, insisting that she will enter the employ of Madame Christophor. Madame Christophor offers Sir Julien her house as a refuge from the wrath of Herr Freudenberg, but he spurns it and goes to his own quarters where Madame Ixe calls. Sir Julien divines that her visit is at the request of Herr Freudenberg and while she makes love to him he disarms her of a small revolver. Thus he thwarts the second attempt made upon his life.

Sir Julien's death is reported in Berlin and London, following an explosion that wrecked his lodgings. The news provokes a violent scene between Mrs. Carraby and her husband, Herr Freudenberg in Berlin, rejoicing inwardly that at last Sir Julien is out of the way is surprised beyond measure to read another of Sir Julien's articles. Learning that he still is alive, Herr Freudenberg returns to Paris where he commands the suicide of Estermen, his secret agent who has failed to kill Sir Julien.

CHAPTER XIV.

SANCTUARY.

"THIS AFTERNOON," Madame Christophor declared, looking thoughtfully at Julien, "I am going to send you a new secretary."

He turned a little eagerly in his easy chair.

"Lady Anne!" he exclaimed.

"Are you glad?" she asked.

Julien hesitated. His eyes sought his companion's face. She was seated at the small writing table drawn up close to his side, her head resting upon her left hand, the pen in her right fingers sketching idle figures at the bottom of the sheet which she had just written. She was wearing a dress of strange-colored muslin, a shade between gray and silver, but from underneath came a shimmer of blue, and there were turquoises about her neck. Her large, soft eyes were fixed steadfastly upon his. There was a sort of question in them which he seemed to have surprised there more than once during the last few days.

A sudden uneasiness seized him. His brain was crowded with unwilling fancies. There were, without doubt, symptoms of coquetry in her appearance. He had spoken of blue as the one sublime color. As she leaned a little back in her chair, resting from her labors, he could scarcely help noticing the blue silk stockings and suede shoes which matched the hidden color of her skirt, the ribbon which gleamed from the dusky masses of her hair. Madame Christophor was always a very beautiful and a very elegant woman, and it seemed to have pleased her during these last few days to appear at her best. Julien gripped for a moment at his bandaged arm.

"You are in pain? You would like me to change the bandage?" she suggested almost eagerly.

"Not yet," he replied. "It is still quite comfortable."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"You have the air of wanting something," she remarked. "Is there anything that displeases you?"

"Displeases me! If you knew how strange that sounded!" he exclaimed. "I do not think that any one ever lived with such luxury, or was treated with so much kindness, as I during the last few days. You make every second perfect."

Madame Christophor sighed. Almost as Julien finished his speech he regretted its conclusion. Madame Christophor, on the other hand, although she sighed, seemed vaguely content.

"You see, the fates against whom you have so great a grievance have done something to atone," she declared. "No doubt you hated to leave your work to come and speak to me in the street that afternoon. No doubt your redheaded journalist friend hated me also. Yet if you had not come, if my automobile had been detained a few minutes on the way—ah! it is terrible indeed to think what might not have happened!"

She shivered. A moment later she raised her eyes and continued.

"I think," she said, "you must abandon a little of your hostility against my sex. It was a woman who worked this mischief in your life and a woman who was fortunate enough to save it. I think you can almost cry quits with us, Sir Julien."

He smiled. He was struggling to lead back their conversation to a lighter level. A certain change in this woman's tone and manner, a change which was reflected even in her appearance, disturbed him painfully.

"The balance is already on my side, dear hostess," he assured her. "You have left me an eternal debtor to your sex. I shall never again indulge in generalities or wholesale condemnation. It is, after all, foolish. But tell me why you are sending Lady Anne to help me today?"

She watched for any trace of disappointment in his tone. There was none. On the contrary, his mention of Lady Anne was accompanied by a slight earnestness which puzzled her.

"I have a few social duties to attend to," she explained a little vaguely. "Lady Anne is quite efficient. I like her handwriting, too. It is like herself—clean-cut, legible. There are no hidden pools about Lady Anne."

"Yet," he said, "a woman always keeps some part of herself concealed."

"You think that Lady Anne, too, has her secret?" Madame Christophor asked, raising her eyes.

"I think that if she has, she is quite capable of keeping it," he replied.

There was a knock at the door. Lady Anne entered. She came a few yards into the room with a slight smile upon her lips, and nodded pleasantly to Julien. In her slim stateliness, the untroubled serenity of youth reflected in her smiling grace, she represented perfectly the other type of womanhood. Madame Christophor rose deliberately to her feet. For one swift moment she measured the things between them. She herself was conscious of a greater intellectual maturity, a more subtle quality in her looks, a beauty less describable, more exotic, perhaps, but also more provocative. The arts of her sex were at her fingertips, the small arts disdained by this well looking and perfectly healthy young woman. She turned her head quickly toward Sir Julien. It was the idle impulse of the man or woman who plucks the petals from a flower. Julien was gazing steadfastly at Lady Anne. Madame Christophor picked up her belongings and moved toward the door.

"Be merciless today, my friend!" she exclaimed, pausing upon the threshold. —"virulent, if you will! Le Jour was screaming at you last night. Jesen has lost his head a little; or is it the lash of his master which he feels? How can one tell?"

"After tonight," Julien remarked, with a smile, "who will read Le Jour? I shall tell the story of the purchase of that paper by Herr Freudenberg. French people will not love to think that the pen of Jesen has been guided by the hand of Germany."

Madame Christophor made a little grimace.

"My friend," she declared, "my house is, I believe, the safest spot in Paris, yet there are limits. Remember that you have become a celebrity. There is an agitation in England to have you back at the foreign office. All Paris is divided upon the subject of your life or death. And there are men here in the city, who seek for you night and day, with death in their hands. My house is sanctuary, but no one can write such things as you are writing and deem themselves secure against any risk."

He smiled at her confidently.

"Yet you would not have me leave out one single line, you would not have me lower the torch for one second! You suggest caution!—you, who haven't the word 'fear' in your vocabulary! It is your house, not mine. There are more bombs to be bought in Paris. You tell me, would you have me spare a single word of the truth?"

She flashed back her answer across the room. For the moment she forgot Lady Anne. They two were on another plane.

"Not one word," she assured him, with soft yet vibrant earnestness. "I would have you write the truth in letters of fire upon the clouds, for all Paris to see. You have a message. See that it goes out."

Madame Christophor closed the door softly behind her. Julien remained looking at the spot from which she had disappeared. Then he drew a little breath.

"She is wonderful!" he muttered.

Lady Anne took up her pen. She avoided looking at him.

"Let us begin," she said.

They wrote for hours. Julien was in the mood for this final and fierce attack upon Le Jour and all the powers that stood behind it. He held up Falkenberg to derision—the charlatan of modern politics, the Puck of Berlin, whose one sincerity was his hatred for England, and one capacity the giant capacity for mischief. He wound up his article with a scathing and personal denunciation of Falkenberg, and a splendidly worded appeal to the French nation not for one moment to be deceived as to the character of this tireless and ambitious schemer after the country's welfare. All the time Anne took down his words in fluent and flowing writing. When at last he had finished, he looked at the sheets which surrounded her with something like amazement.

"Why, what a pig I've been, Anne!" he exclaimed, glancing from the table to the clock. "You must have been writing for nearly three hours!"

She was busy picking up the sheets.

"Quite, I should say," she answered, "but I loved it. Now I am going to ring for tea, and afterward you must read it through. We might get the manuscript down to the office tonight."

"I shall need you when I read it through," he reminded her. "There will be corrections."

"Either Madame Christophor or I will be here," she replied. "Madame Christophor may have some other work for me."

He looked at her curiously.

"Even you are different," he murmured.

"Tell me at once what you mean?" she begged.

"I wish I knew," he confessed. "To tell you the truth, Anne, a curious feeling of detachment seems to have come over me—during the last few days especially. It is such a short time since I was living the ordinary sort of mechanical life in London, engaged to be married to you, and my doing day by day all mapped out—a life interesting, of course, but without any real variation. And now here I am, hanging on to life by the thin edge of nothing, writing such things as I should never have dared to have said from my seat in the house, practically an adventurer. Do you wonder that sometimes I am not quite sure that it isn't all a nightmare? I am actually hiding here in Paris from assassins—in Paris the most civilised city in the world—the guest of a woman whose acquaintance I made only because a little manicurist in Soho insisted upon it. And you, Anne, are here by my side, a professional secretary, the friend of a milliner, more intimate and on better terms with me than you were in the days when we were engaged to be married! What has happened to us, Anne? How did we get here?"

She laughed at him tolerantly.

"We've come a little into our own, I suppose," she remarked. "As for me, I feel a different woman since I stepped out of the made-to-order world. And you—well, don't be angry, but you're not nearly so much of a prig, are you Julien? You're less starched and more human. Of course, we are more companionable. We are both more human."

He nodded.

"I suppose that so far as I am concerned Kendricks had something to do with it—he was always trying to make me look at things differently. But it seems such a short time for such an absolute change."

She was balancing her pen upon the ink pot—keeping her eyes turned from him.

"It isn't always a matter of time, you know, Julien," she said thoughtfully. "You were never really a prig—I was never really a machine for wearing a ready-made smile and a few smart frocks. It took a shock to make us see things, but neither of us remained willfully blind. You'll be back in your world before long and a better man than ever."

"And you?"

"I have hopes some day of becoming a perfect secretary," she confessed. "If I fail, I will at least make more bows than any one else in a day."

He leaned toward her, showing a sudden and dangerous forgetfulness of his bandaged arm.

"Anne," he said firmly, "if I go back, you go back. Sometimes I think that I shall never regret anything that has happened if——"

The door was softly opened. It was Madame Christophor who entered with a little pile of letters in her hand. Lady Anne, with slightly heightened color, rose to her feet. There was something in Madame Christophor's eyes which was almost fiercely questioning.

"I am not disturbing you, I trust?" she asked slowly. "I bring Sir Julien some letters."

He caught up the sheets which lay by his side.

"I will not even look at them until I have corrected my article," he declared.

Madame Christophor settled herself composedly in an easy chair.

"Lady Anne shall read it aloud," she proposed calmly, "and I will assist in the corrections. For the French edition I may be able to suggest. The papers are today most amusing," she continued. "The German press is almost unreadable. No wonder that there is a price upon your head, my friend!"

Julien moved restlessly in his place.

"I have had the most extraordinary luck," he remarked. "No other man, naturally, knew so much of the Anglo-German and the Anglo-French relations. And instead of being at home in Downing street, and muzzled, I happened to be here on the spot, to run up against Falkenberg, discover his little schemes, and with my own special knowledge to see through them at once. No one else ever had such an opportunity."

Madame Christophor smiled enigmatically. She was looking thoughtfully across at her guest.

"It is not every opportunity in life," she murmured, "which a man knows how to embrace!"

CHAPTER XV.

NEARING A CRISIS.

THAT night, for the first time since his arrival in the house as a guest, Julien dined downstairs. To his surprise, when he presented himself in the smaller salon to which he had been directed, he found the table laid for two only. Madame Christophor, who was standing on the threshold of the winter garden opening out from the apartment, read his expression and frowned.

"You expected Lady Anne to dine?" she asked bluntly.

Julien was taken a little aback.

"It seemed natural to expect her," he admitted.

Madame Christophor moved toward the bell, but Julien intercepted her. He remembered all that he owned to this woman. He was ashamed of his lack of tact.

"Dear Madame Christophor," he pleaded, "forgive me if for a moment I forgot how altered things are. Indeed, it was not a matter of choice with me. Of course, it will give me the greatest pleasure to dine tete-a-tete with you!"

He was, perhaps, a shade too impressive, but Madame Christophor, as all women who greatly desire to read in a man's words what she chooses to find there, hesitated. Finally, with a shrug of the shoulders, she turned away from the bell.

"Three is such an impossible number," she declared, with well assumed carelessness. "Lady Anne has her own salon adjoining her apartment. She dines there always. If I am without company I enjoy the rest of being alone. She is very delightful in her own way, your dear Lady Anne, but she and I have not much in common. Come and see my roses."

She led the way into the conservatory, a dome shaped building with covered glass at the top, fragrant, almost faint with the perfumne of roses and drooping exotics. A little fountain was playing in the middle. When the butler announced the service of dinner and they returned to take their places, she left the door open.

"Tonight," she announced, as they sat side by side at the small round table, "I am going to take advantage of the situation. I am your hostess and you are an invalid. It is my opportunity to talk. Are you a good listener, Sir Julien?"

She had dropped her voice almost to a whisper. Those beautiful deep set eyes were challenging his. She seemed to have made up her mind that for that night, at any rate, her beauty should be unquestioned. She wore a dress of black net fitting very closely, a wonderful background for her white skin and the ropes of pearls which were entwined about her neck. He had never seen her decollette, but he remembered reading in a ladies' fashion paper that a famous sculptor had once declared her neck and bust to be the most beautiful in Paris. She had even added the slightest touch of color to her cheeks. There was no longer any sign of the wrinkles at the sides of her eyes. She read the half ingenous, half unwilling admiration in his face, and she laughed at him.

"Ah, my friend," she murmured, "I can see that you object to the role of listener! Very well, then, you shall talk. You shall tell me of your life in England. You shall tell me what dreams have come to you for the days when once more you shall help to shape the destinies of your nation. Tell me how you mean to live! Shall you be again—what was it Lady Anne thought you?—a prig?"

"I am like many other and more famous men," he remarked. "I have learned much in adversity."

"I read the English papers," she continued presently. "I have also a large correspondence. Do you know that there is nearly a rebellion in your party? Questions have been asked about you in the House. Both sides want you back. There is a feeling that you were allowed to go much too easily, that the indiscretion of which you were guilty was a trifle. This man Carraby is what you call—a cad! That does not do in the high places. Nationality cannot conceal a lack of breeding."

"I have thought over many things," Julien admitted. "If the way is made clear for me, I shall go back. Why not? I believe that I can serve my country, and it is the life for which I am best fitted. Carraby may have his good points, but his ambitions have been a little too extensive. He would have made a better mayor of the town where he was born."

"You are right," she declared. "There is no place for such men in the great world. You will go back. It is written. See—I drink to England's future prime minister!"

She raised her glass, which the butler had just filled with champagne. She looked into his eyes as she drank and Julien was conscious of a passing uneasiness. She set the glass down, empty. Her hand lay for a moment near his.

"You will go back," she murmured. "You will forget. The people whom you have met in your brief period of adversity will seem to you like shadows. Is it not so?"

He took her hand and raised it boldly to his lips.

"It will never be like that with you, dear hostess," he assured her. "There are things which one does not forget."

She did not withdraw her hand. Its pressure upon his fingers was faint but insistent.

"Do you remember when we first met," she said softly, "how bitter we were against the others—even at first against one another? You had been betrayed by that unimportant woman and the whole sex was hateful to you. I had just come from seeing the tragedy caused by a man's crass selfishness. I too, was wearing the fetters. To me the whole of your sex seemed abominable. * * * You see," she went on, "my marriage was a terrible disappointment. I fancied that I was marrying a great man, a genius, an inspired statesman, and I found myself allied to a political machine. My wealth—I have told you, I wonder that I am very wealthy?—helped him. For the rest, I was a puppet by his side. I lived in Berlin for one year. Official life in Berlin for an American woman, even though she be Princess von Falkenberg, is still intolerable. The men were bad enough, the women worse. I could not breathe. I was no part of my husband's life. I was no part of any one's life. The German women did not understand me. My husband—oh, he is very German in his heart—only laughed at my complaints. He would have been perfectly willing to see me become as those others—hausfrau—bearers of children, a domestic article. So we separated—divorce at that moment was impossible. I came back to Paris."

"You had no children?" Julien asked.

"One boy," she answered, her eyes becoming very soft. "Do not let us speak of him for a moment."

The service of dinner continued. Outside, the water from the fountain fell into the basin with a gentle, monotonous sound. The perfume of the roses stole through the open doorway. One softly-shaded lamp had been lit, but the rest of the lofty room remained in shadowy obscurity. The light from that one lamp seemed to fall full upon Madame Christophor's beautiful face.

"I loved my boy," she went on. "It was part of my husband's cruelty to detach him from me. He has the law on his side. I may not even see Rudolf. Very well, I do my best to steel my heart. I came here to live. I have many friends, but Falkenberg is the only man to whom I have ever belonged, and he has treated me as he would have treated one of these others—his companions for the moment. I have occupied myself here in work of different sorts. I have tried in my way to do good among women less happy, even than I. Wherever I went I saw that every woman who had sinned, every woman who is miserable, every woman who has become a blot upon the earth, is what she is by reason of man's selfishness. Can you wonder that I have grown a little bitter?"

"I wonder at nothing in the woman who has been Falkenberg's wife," Julian replied. "He seems to me the most unscrupulous person who ever breathed. Yet in his way he is marvelously attractive."

"He is," she admited. "I fell in love with him against my will. Directly my reason intervened, the madness was over. How old do you think I am, Sir Julien?"

Julien was a little startled.

"How old?" he repeated.

"A foolish question, of course," she continued. "How could you be honest! I am 28 years old. I believe that I am the richest woman in Paris. I am tired of being called brilliant and cynical, of showing fortune hunters to the door, of living my life in loneliness. Falkenberg has sworn that if I take steps to make a divorce possible, I shall never see my boy again. I have not seen him, as it is, for nearly two years. The threat is losing its terrors. You are listening, my friend?"

"Of course."

She turned to the butler. The other servants had already left the room.

"Bring coffee into the winter garden," she ordered. "Come, Sir Julien."

She lit a cigarete and threw it away almost immediately. Her eyes were gleaming like stars. She laid her fingers upon his arm as they passed out into the perfumed air of the conservatory, and he seemed to feel some touch of the fire that was burning in her veins. She swayed a little towards him. The color in her cheeks was brilliant. Her bosom was rising and falling quickly. She was splendidly handsome, nerved up to great things, a woman inspired by a purpose. Julien was afraid. He, too, felt something of the excitement of the moment, but his brain seemed numbed. There was nothing he could say. She threw herself back into a low chair and drew him down to her side. With her other hand she caught hold of a cluster of pink roses and pressed their cool blossoms to her cheek.

"Sir Julien," she murmured, "I have looked so steadfastly into life, I have striven so hard to find a place there. I have something to give. I do not come empty-handed. I can place offerings upon the altar of the great god. I have myself, my brains, such as they are, and the golden key which unlocks the wonderful doors. Can you wonder that I ask for something in return? I have stood in the marketplace of life, I have passed down between the stalls, and I am humiliated. There is no life, there is no career upon this world for a woman. It is a strange doctrine, perhaps, to preach in these days, but I have searched and I know it to be the truth. Nature meant woman for man and if she rebels there is no seat for her alone among the mighty places. Alone I can win none of the things I desire. You see, I talk to you like this, nakedly, because we are of the order of those who understand. You very nearly married a duke's daughter and became a middle class politician. Don't do it. Don't think of it any more, Julien. You were meant for the great places, and I think—I think—that I was meant to hold the torch to light you there!"

"Madame Christophor!"

She started at his tone. In the splendid arrogance of her assured position, her brilliant gifts, her almost inspired individuality, failure had never occurred to her. Even now she refused to read the message in his set face.

"You feel, perhaps," she went on, leaning towards him, "that you are pledged to Lady Anne. Dear Sir Julien, rub your eyes! I want you to see—all the way to the skies. Lady Anne is a sweet girl who will look nice at the head of any one's table. She will read the papers and take an intelligent interest in her husband's work, and ask him trite and obvious questions to prove that she understands all about it. She will give you phenacetin when you have a headache, she will fill your house with the right sort of people. She will be very amiable and very satisfied. She'll always read the debates and she'll sit up for you at night in a pretty dressing gown. And all the time the wall will grow, brick by brick, and you will look up to the skies and find them empty, and listen for the music and hear none, and a web will be spun about your heart and your brain will be clogged and the fine thoughts will go and you'll never be anything but a successful politician. You know very well that all the paths to the great pit of unhappiness are crowded with men who have been successful in their profession."

She swayed even closer towards him her head a little thrown back, her eyes inviting him. He scrambled to his feet. Still she held out her hands.

"Won't you trust me?" she begged. "Believe me that I know the way into the great places, Julien."

"Listen!" he cried hoarsely. "You have offered me everything except your love. Thank heaven you did not offer me that! I love Lady Anne."

"Everything except my love!" she exclaimed, with the first note of trouble in her tone. "Everything except my love! Are you mad?"

"I love Lady Anne," he repeated, setting his teeth.

They stood facing one another. She tore a handful of the blossoms from a syringa tree and commenced crushing them in her fingers. The sound of footsteps scarcely disturbed her. The butler appeared, followed by Lady Anne. The former excused himself with a grave face.

"Madame," he announced, "the Prince von Falkenberg is here."

Madame Christophor turned slowly around.

"The Prince von Falkenberg? Where?"

"In the waiting-room, madame."

She moved away. She did not glance toward Julien.

"I come," she announced.

Lady Anne had some leters in her hand, which she handed to Julien. He threw them hastily aside and drew her suddenly into his arms, and into the shadow of the giant palm.

"Anne," he pleaded, "not because of your mother, not because you would make me a suitable wife, but because I love you, will you marry me?"

He felt her relax in his arms.

"Julien!" she murmured.

"I didn't finish the sentence," he went on—"tomorrow at the embassy?"

"Absurd!"

"It's the only way," he insisted confidently. "We couldn't be married in London. All the tribe of Harbord would come and boo, and it would save no end of gossip and bother when we got back. Anne—I love you very much and I want you just as soon as I can get you!"

"Of course, if you put it like that," she said softly—

"Well?"

"This is the only frock I have."

"The Rue de la Paix is at our gates," he reminded her.

"Be sensible," she begged. "You can't show yourself about Paris. Something terrible will happen."

"Not it!" he replied confidently. "It's too late."

His arm crept a little further around her waist, he drew her even further back among the drooping palms.

"I think that I like this better than the last time you asked me!" she whispered.

CHAPTER XVI.

FALKENBERG'S LAST EFFORT.

"MADAME," Prince Falkenberg declared, with a formal bow, "I owe you a thousand apologies for this visit."

Madame Christopher looked at him across the room, and in her eyes there was no welcome nor any anger—only surprise.

"You break," she reminded him, "the word of a prince!"

Falkenberg smiled icily.

"There are cataclysms in life," he said, "whirlpools into which one may sometimes be drawn. One's will is overborne. I myself am in that unfortunate position."

Madame Christophor looked steadfastly at her visitor. Was it her fancy or was he really growing older, this man of iron? The story of the last few weeks was written into his face, there were shadows under his eyes, a deep line across his forehead.

"Since you are here, be seated," she invited, sinking herself wearily into a chair. "Tell me as quickly as you can what has brought you?"

"Portel has brought me," Falkenberg answered grimly. "They tell me that he has taken shelter under the shadow of your petticoats."

"Shelter from your assassins!"

"Precisely!" Falkenberg admitted.

"I do not admire your methods," Madame Christophor remarked. "They seem to me not only brutal but clumsy. You killed seven men and injured several others, to no purpose."

"Madame," Falkenberg declared, "to secure the death of that man I would have destroyed a whole quarter of Paris and every prison in it."

Madame Christophor shivered.

"Thorough, as usual, my dear prince," she murmured. "Nevertheless, I find such statements loathsome. We should have outlived the days of barbarity. I do not understand men who deal in such fashion with their enemies."

Falkenberg frowned.

"There is something between us greater than personal enmity," he retorted fiercely. "My personal enemy I would deal with in such a manner as I make no doubt would commend itself to your scruples. Julien Portel is more than that. He is the enemy of my country. Upon him, therefore, I shall have no mercy."

"I will not argue with you," she replied. "There is a plainer issue before us. In passing my threshold you have broken your word of honor. What do you want?"

"I want Julien Portel!"

Madame Christophor shrugged her shoulders.

"You have wanted him for some little time."

"Never so badly as at this instant," Falkenberg declared bitterly. "He has set all Europe in a ferment with those infernal letters. He knows too much. He knows whence came the money which brought Le Jour. He knows every detail of my campaign here."

"There are surely others," she objected, "who must have guessed—"

"But there was no one else," she interrupted, "who had the special knowledge which Portel has. He came from the foreign office, with the records of the last two years in his mind. At Berlin he and I crossed swords. He is the only Englishman who has ever caused me a moment's uneasiness."

"Are you sure," she asked, "that your campaign here has been a wise one?"

"The wisdom of Solomon," he replied grimly, "can be made to look like folly by the accident of failure. There is no doubt as to its wisdom. No one has studied these matters as I have studied them. No one has seen the truth more clearly. An alliance between England and America is a matter of a few years only, and when it comes to the progress of Germany is set back for a generation. The one absolute necessity before me was to cut the bonds between England and France and to settle with England alone and quickly—diplomatically, if possible and quickly—diplomatically, if squrce. We don't seek war, Henriette. We are not really a bloodthirsty nation. We seek territory. We need new lands—fruitful lands, trade, and command of the seas. If we cannot get what we want by peaceful means, then it must be war. England for the present is weakly governed. She is in the throes of labor troubles. Her political parties are ill balanced. There is a puppet at the foreign office. Now is the time to strike."

"Is it wise to tell me your secrets?" she inquired coldly. "I have no sympathy for you or your country."

"I have a bargain to strike with you and you must understand," he answered. "Twenty-four hours ago we dispatched a gunboat to a certain neutral port which comes under the influence of England. We paid a German to go there and send us word that he was in danger. We have sent an intimation to the French and English governments. To England it is an insult. I have taken the chance that France has had enough of this entente. Now you understand why I must have Julien Portel before they can get him back to the foreign office, before he can do more mischief. A strong man in Downing street at this juncture might upset everything."

"I understand well enough why you need Julien Portel," she admitted. "I am still in the dark, however, as to why you imagine that I shall give him up."

"Because I am going to buy him from you," Falkenberg asserted.

She glanced across the room at him, half curiously, half scornfully.

"Buy him! You!"

"Exactly," he replied. "You smile because you do not understand. I offer you a dispensation for your divorce, and your son.

A little tremor seemed to pass through her whole frame. For a moment she closed her eyes. Then she sprang to her feet and stood quivering before him.

"This is one of your traps!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean it!"

"To prove that I do," he insisted, "I have brought Rudolph with me from Paris. He can be in your arms in a few miuntes. Look into the street, if you will."

She crossed the room hastily and lifted the curtain. A low cry broke from her lips. In the tonneau of the great touring car outside a little boy was lying back amongst the cushions, asleep.

"He is tired," Falkenberg said slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the woman. "He has come all the way from Berlin without an hour's rest. Am I to take him back tomorrow? It is for you to decide."

Madame Christophor turned toward the door. Falkenberg barred the way.

"Not yet!" he declared. "Do you accept my terms?"

"But he is hungry!" she cried. "I can see that he is hungry! And he is so pale—let me fetch him in."

"Of course he is hungry," his father agreed. "He has also been asking me questions about you all the way. He believes that he is going to see you. I, too, believe that. You consent?"

"Tell me exactly what it is that you require?" she demanded.

"Take me to Portel," he answered swiftly. "Inform him that you cannot any longer permit him the shelter of your roof."

She sat down and began to laugh, softly but in unnatural fashion. Falkenberg watched her with grim curiosity.

"And then?" she inquired.

He hesitated.

"I have made some plans," he said slowly. "If he passes outside your doors tonight, he will write no more articles."

Falkenberg smiled incredulously, but he said nothing. Madame Christophor had found her way once more to the window. She stood there, looking down into the car. The boy was still asleep. She gripped the window curtains with both her hands. He was so pale, so tired, and how he had grown!

"I give you even his heritage," Falkenberg promised. "Make of him a Frenchman or an American, if you will. He is your own son. Take him. I give my first born for my country. You will not refuse what I offer?"

Madame Christophor made no answer. Falkenberg, however, saw the longing in her face. It was enough! He suddenly changed his tactics.

"This Julien Portel," he said,—"it is another woman he prefers."

He saw her bosom heave. The storm against which she had been struggling all the time seemed on the point of bursting. The hot blood was singing in her ears, her eyes wer aflame. She crossed the room and rang the bell. Falkenberg was content to wait. He felt that he had won! The butler appeared almost immediately.

"You will conduct the Prince von Falkenberg into the winter garden," she ordered. "He desires to speak to Sir Julien Portel."

"And you?" Falkenberg asked, turning toward her.

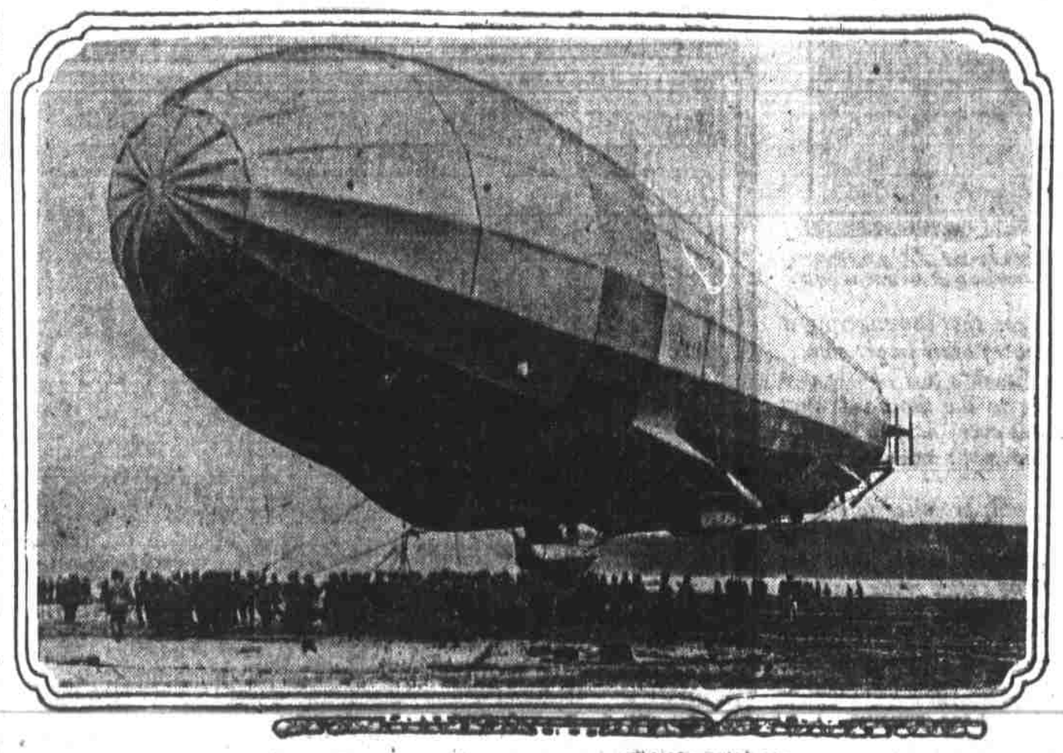
A swift glance showed him her disordered countenance. It was reasonable.

"I follow," she announced.

(To be Continued Next Sunday)

REMARKABLE PICTURE OF THE SCHWABEN

Huge German Dirigible Recently Destroyed by Explosion



—Photograph by International News Service.

This picture of the immense airship was taken near Dusseldorf, June 28, shortly before the craft was entirely destroyed by an explosion that injured several persons, though none was killed.