

The Earl Of Nowhere

By

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Freeditorial 

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I. THE KING'S MESSENGER

EVERY city has its own peculiar voice. Neither the harsh roar of London, the nerve destroying staccato of sound which belongs exclusively to New York, nor the kettledrum buzz of Madrid is comparable with the voice of Paris, which is mainly vocal.

"Queer thing about Paris, sir," said Jim Selby, "somebody is always talking."

The staid Vice-Councillor of the British Embassy lifted his head, and, being literally-minded, listened.

"I hear nobody—except you," he said.

In that quiet room very little sound came through the double windows, nor, situated as it was, and at that hour, was it likely that any sound could penetrate to the sedate bureau.

Jim Selby chuckled to himself, having a sense of humour that was superior to the overwhelming majesty of embassies. A lean, brown faced man, on the optimistic side of thirty, he found life an amusing business and the office of King's Messenger less humdrum than he had been led to expect.

The hands of the French clock above the fireplace pointed to nine. Outside, an ungentle flurry of sleet and snow was falling, and Jim had an engagement to meet Lady Vyvan Sanclair at ten.

The Vice Councillor, who had resumed his writing, suddenly looked up.

"What are they saying in London about the Earl of Nowhere?" he asked. Jim smiled.

"He's a weird bird, isn't he? You mean the Earl of Saltesh, who makes himself so unpleasant to people?"

The Councillor nodded.

"Is it a hoax, or a joke in bad taste?" he asked. "I thought the title had died out."

"Perhaps that is the reason our mysterious friend uses it," said Jim dryly. "I can't say that I approve of people who set themselves above the law, and administer justice in their own peculiar fashion; but whoever he is, mad or sane, lord or commoner, he is doing remarkable work."

The Embassy chief growled something under his breath.

"It is drastic," admitted Jim, "and a little risky for his invisible lordship. For a man who shoots up gaming clubs and beats up blackmailers, and is dealing with a hundred-and-one little gangs that abound in London, can't he a bad fellow at heart, even though he may not be Lord Saltesh."

The Vice-Councillor leant back in his chair and looked strangely at the messenger. Then, to Jim's surprise, he said:

"I'm sending you to London to-morrow afternoon, and I'd give a lot of money if I were perfectly certain Lord Saltesh was on the train with you!"

"Why on earth—" began Jim, in amazement.

"I'll tell you one of these days. Of course, there is no Lord Saltesh. The old earl was never married; and Lord Felboro, who administered the estate for his cousin years before Saltesh went out, told me there wasn't enough money left to pay one year's interest on the mortgages. All the same, I wish I could lay my hands upon the gentleman."

"Felboro, who administered the estate for his cousin years before Saltesh went out, told me there wasn't enough money left to pay one year's interest on the mortgages. All the same, I wish I could lay my hands upon the gentleman."

"But why?" asked Jim again.

The Vice-Councillor unlocked a drawer, pulled it open and took out an envelope, from which he extracted a sheet of paper.

"Look at this," he said.

Jim took up the sheet and read:

On Wednesday morning the draft of the Treaty between the Transcaucasian and the British Governments will arrive in Paris from Tiflis. This information has reached certain interested people in London too late for them to intercept your messenger from Transcaucasia. If you wish the Treaty to reach the Foreign Office, avoid ordinary routes; the air route is the most dangerous of all.

It was signed "Saltesh," and the paper, Jim noted, bore at the top an embossed coronet.

"Do you take any serious notice of this?"

The other nodded.

"Very serious. The Transcaucasian Treaty touches very nearly some of the biggest oil interests in the world. It is a condition of the Tiflis Government that the Treaty shall go through to London without being read even by me. The Tiflis people are not in very good odour with the Soviet Government, and they're scared of the terms being revealed until they have the support of our people. Otherwise it would have been a simple matter to have telegraphed the Treaty word for word."

"I see," said Jim thoughtfully. "And this is the 'vital document' I am to take back to town?"

"Exactly. Now I think you'd better run off and meet your lady."

Jim gasped.

"How did you know——" he began.

"That you're supping with Lady Vyvan?" The older man smiled. "My dear Captain Selby, you forget that this is Paris, and that an Embassy is naturally very curious about its servants. You have been watched ever since you came to

this city. You see," he went on, before Jim could speak, "we can't afford to take risks."

"By which route do I go back to London?" asked the Messenger.

The Councillor smiled grimly.

"That very important piece of information will not be given to you until five minutes before you leave," he said.

Ciro's Restaurant was filled when Jim arrived, and he looked around the crowded room helplessly until a white-gloved hand signalled him, and then he made his way through the dancers to the little alcove table where Vyvan Sanclair was awaiting him. A slim girl in the early twenties, with a flawless complexion and grey eyes, arresting and live, she had, in her manner and poise, something of her French mother, little save the dignity of Lord Felboro, her father.

"I thought you weren't coming."

"You said ten," apologized Jim, and she smiled.

"All the same, I thought you weren't coming. One never knows what's going to happen to a King's Messenger once he disappears in the Faubourg St. Honoré. There was even a possibility that you might have been kidnapped by the Earl of Nowhere."

He laughed.

"Does his lordship interest you, too? By the way, where did he get that name?"

"Father gave it to him," she said absently. "I should love to meet that bizarre person."

"As he operates in London," said Jim, "you're hardly likely to meet him on the boulevards."

Vyvan raised her eyes to him.

"Are you sure?" she asked quietly, and, before he could speak, went on; "I have had an uncomfortable feeling that, whenever you and I have been out together, we have been shadowed." And then, seeing the laughter in his eyes: "You knew?" she asked quickly.

"I knew to-night for the first time. The Vice-Councillor told me that they'd put a watch-dog on my track to see that I came to no mischief."

Her sigh was one of relief.

"I'm glad," she said. "You will probably be amused at my fears, but I'm the most easily scared woman in Paris. When are you returning?"

Jim hesitated. She, with her quick intuition, realized that the question was one she ought not to have asked.

"I am afraid I was indiscreet," she said. "I'll tell you that I'm going back to London to-morrow night, and if I have you for fellow-passenger I shall be very pleased."

"Why?" he asked.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"I don't know," she answered vaguely.

"Are you glad to be going back?"

Her lips twitched.

"To Felboro and to father?" she asked, and there was a hint of quiet sarcasm in her voice.

He was silent. Lord Felboro had an international reputation: he was a man who lived just a little too close to the border line which separates the permissible from the unpermissible to be a desirable acquaintance. His name had unaccountably disappeared from the roll of membership of two of the best London clubs, and he, who had been persona grata with the leaders of the social world, suffered the indignity of having his application for admission to the Royal Enclosure at Ascot rejected.

"No; I'm not glad to be going back," she said. "I go because the devils drive, and most terrifying of the devils is a letter from father saying that he's had to curtail my allowance."

She checked a rising sigh, and then looking wistful:

"You haven't asked me what I would like for supper!" she said, with a faint smile. "I want something very nice and very expensive."

The deep, booming notes of Big Ben striking the midnight hour were reverberating in the air when Lord Felboro stepped from his glistening Rolls and crossed the threshold of the Frolic Club. A footman came forward, resplendent in blue and silver, took his lordship's hat and murmured a respectful greeting.

Felboro looked around the vestibule with its soft-hued walls, its glowing alabaster vases and banked roses, and his lip curled. Through the glass-panelled doors he could see the supper-room, the dancing floor crowded with overdressed women and insignificant men. The mechanical regular strains of the noisy orchestra came faintly, and the atmosphere of the vestibule was heavy with a medley of exotic perfumes.

"Do you know if Sir Charles is here, Philip?"

"Yes, my lord; I think I saw him go to the American bar."

Philip, the footman, six feet of masculinity from his buckled shoes to his powdered head, knew everybody. He had the low voice and the deferential manner of the perfect servant.

"Philip is the only good-looking man that ever goes to the Frolic Club," said a cynic, "and very nearly the only gentleman."

Lord Felboro pulled at his fair moustache, with a frown of doubt.

"I suppose there is the usual crowd here to-night?"

"There were a large number of members dining and a very considerable number came on from the theatre," said Philip, who had never been known to speak disparagingly of the Frolic Club and its curious membership. "Would your lordship wish me to page Sir Charles?"

Lord Felboro nodded, and Philip went noiselessly across the tessellated floor and pressed an invisible bell in the wall. A page appeared as if by magic, and, receiving his instructions, vanished down a long corridor. In a few minutes he returned with Sir Charles Tasker.

Felboro was tall and thin and bore himself with the elegance of the patrician. Sir Charles, with his inflamed face and bulbous nose, was short, grotesquely fat, and looked what he was, the self-made man and badly made at that.

"Want to see me, Felboro?" he grunted, as he came breathlessly into the vestibule.

Lord Felboro looked round, and then walked to a settee as far as possible away from Philip and the danger of eavesdropping.

"I've had a 'phone from my man in Paris," he said, lowering his voice. "Selby left Paris late last night by aeroplane for Brussels."

Tasker screwed up his face to a frown.

"Why Brussels?" he asked suspiciously. "Why not direct to London?"

Felboro smiled wearily.

"My dear good friend Tasker," he said, "you must credit these people with a little intelligence. Possibly they suspected the possibility of a cleverly manoeuvred aeroplane collision over the Channel and a waiting boat to pick up a dead pilot and his passenger. No, he's coming into England by the back-door—possibly Antwerp-Harwich or Ostend-Gravesend."

The other fingered his thick lips nervously.

"If he suspects——" he began.

"He? Who?" asked Lord Felboro sharply. Then, seeing Philip's head turn, he lowered his voice.

"Who do you think? This blamed earl, of course!" growled Tasker, and Lord Felboro laughed softly.

"What on earth should he have to do with our—business arrangements?" he asked.

Tasker did not reply for a moment.

"He's out for any kind of arrangement that is crooked," he said. "I tell you, Felboro, I'm scared. I'm not worried about the police; I don't care that"—he snapped his fingers—"for the best secret service in the world. But this man who works alone—he's a devil! Did you hear what happened to Tommy Grimbley? He took him out of his bed and flogged him in his own room, and not a person in the house heard it. And all because Tommy had got a little too fresh with some typist or other."

(Sir Charles was putting a very charitable construction upon "Tommy's" offence.)

"Philip is a good fellow," growled Felboro under his breath, "and he's a very trustworthy man, but I've not the slightest desire that he should know all our secrets."

"He's a crook, too," was the startling reply.

"Philip a crook?" whispered Felboro, and shot a glance at the unconscious footman.

"Yes; he's been in gaol—five years for robbery with assault, and five years for another crime," said Sir Charles. "I was going to tell you about it. I had a letter

from some detective agency to-day, asking me if I knew of Philip's antecedents. That bird may be useful to us."

"Perhaps he will catch the Earl of Nowhere," sneered Felboro.

The other man shifted uneasily.

"You can laugh," he snarled, "but maybe you won't laugh one of these days. And I'll tell you something, Felboro—it's been on my mind for a month, ever since I heard about this man who calls himself Saltesh. You administered the old earl's estate and made a pretty good thing out of it. I know of one money-lender to whom you paid a hundred and forty thousand pounds. You didn't find Bradburys growing like raspberries! Suppose there is an Earl of Saltesh, and suppose he's coming back after you——"

"Why wouldn't he go to the Courts?"

Felboro had gone suddenly old; his face was white and drawn.

"It would be a simpler matter to go to the Courts and prove his identity."

Sir Charles's lips twisted derisively.

"What would he get out of that? A big, fat lawyer's bill! No; if my theory is correct, this fellow is after you; and I'm going to suggest that we let the treaty go. It's too dangerous."

Felboro stared at him.

"Not go after the Treaty?" he asked incredulously. "You know what it's worth to us? At the least a million. I could get a million cash this night from that new oil crowd in the City, once I give them particulars of the leases. You're mad. We're too deeply in this to back out, Tasker. We've got to go through. I only wanted to know the station he arrives at, and that I now know."

"What's your plan?" asked the other.

"You're coming home with me to-night, to Grosvenor Gardens, and you'll wait till I arrive with Selby and help me get him in."

"You're not going to——?"

The man's breath failed him.

"Kill him, I suppose you were going to say? No; it's a much simpler matter. I'm not quite a fool. Selby will never know what really happened to him, and I shall be the last person in the world he will suspect."

"Are you alone in Grosvenor Gardens?" interrupted the other.

"Vyvan's home; she came back from Paris this morning. But you need not worry about the girl; she is so used to my all-night habits that she is hardly likely to leave her room to investigate any strange sound she may hear."

"The servants?"

"Only the cook sleeps in the house, and you couldn't wake her before seven with a hammer. The maids sleep out, do not come on duty till eight."

But the fat man was not convinced.

"This is a big thing, Felboro, a bigger thing than we've ever tackled before. If anything went wrong it would mean penal servitude——"

"What will it mean if they discover that for five years you have been issuing faked balance-sheets and appropriating money from your various companies for your own use?" asked the other quietly. "We want this money badly, you and I. You're not going to back out?"

Sir Charles shook his head, though in his heart was the very fear of death...

Jim Selby had reached Brussels in the early hours of the morning, and, carrying out his instructions to the letter, left the Belgian capital by the first train for Ostend, where he stayed at one of the few hotels which were open at that season.

The Treaty, which had been written on paper of an extraordinary thinness, was secreted beneath his shirt. Nevertheless, he slept that afternoon behind a locked door, a revolver corded to his wrist. That these precautions were necessary he discovered on going for a short stroll before dinner. He had seen two loungers at a street corner, and had mentally noted their appearance. He had not gone fifty yards towards the Place des Armes when, glancing back, he saw the men behind him. Ostend in the winter is a desolation; there were very few people in the streets, and no sign of a gendarme.

The Place des Armes, however, was fairly well filled, for the market had been held that day. He glanced around and saw the two men hesitating at the corner of the Place. They had momentarily lost sight of him, and this was his opportunity. Turning the corner of another street leading into the market-place, he doubled back, and, overhauling a fiacre, ordered the driver to take him back to his hotel.

His ruse was only temporarily successful, for he had hardly been back in his room five minutes when, glancing out of the window, he saw his two

shadowers standing on the opposite sidewalk.

The arrangements, however, which had been made for him in advance were very thorough. It was growing dark when a big limousine swept up to the door, and without a moment's wait Jim, who had paid his bill, stepped into the machine, deposited his valise, and in another second was gliding rapidly towards the centre of the town.

The manoeuvre evidently took the men by surprise. Glancing back through the peephole he saw one of them running across the road to a telephone booth. Probably they also had a car in readiness, he thought. But he saw no sign of them until he had passed through Wenduyn and the lights of Blankenberghe were coming up to meet him. Then it was he saw the two head lamps of the big car twinkling in the distance as they crossed the sandy dunes.

There was a delay of a few minutes at the Dutch frontier whilst he showed his papers, and by the time he was cleared he saw the lights of the car a hundred yards behind. They, however, were not prepared to cross the frontier, and had neither papers nor permis. And for the time being he had shaken off his discomfited enemies.

At midnight, when the Flushing mail packet was on the point of departure, a motor-boat came shooting across the broad waters of the Scheldt, and a very tired young man clambered up to the pier. It was four o'clock and a cold foggy morning when Jim landed at Dover, and had the satisfaction of seeing two Scotland Yard men fall in behind him at half-a-dozen paces' distance and follow him to his carriage, standing before the locked door until the train moved out. He had dozed on the ship, and was wide awake when the train came into Victoria, five minutes ahead of time.

He was looking round for a taxi when a cheerful voice hailed him, and a man in a long fur coat came across the station roadway with outstretched hand.

"Why, Lord Felboro, you're the last person in the world I expected to see at this hour," smiled Jim.

"I came down to meet that inconsiderate daughter of mine, who chose the night boat without regard to her father's need for sleep," said Felboro genially.

"Lady Vyvan? Is she on the train?"

"Doesn't look like it," said Lord Felboro, glancing down the platform. "I suppose she'll arrive by the seven o'clock train. Did you come from Paris?"

"No I didn't come direct from Paris," said Jim; "and I don't think the Paris passengers are on this train. I remember somebody telling me that the Paris

boat had been held up by fog in the Channel."

"Oh, that's it!" said his lordship, apparently relieved. "Well, she'll find her way home. Where are you going?"

Jim's intention had been to go immediately to the Foreign Office and deliver his package to a waiting secretary.

"Foreign Office at this hour of the morning!" scoffed Felboro. "You've a much higher opinion of the industry of Civil Servants than I, my dear Selby! Come along to Grosvenor Place and have some breakfast. You look pretty ill."

"I?" said Jim in surprise. "Good heavens! I never felt better in my life. And I'm afraid I can't go to Grosvenor Place until I have called at Whitehall," he said.

"In that case let me drop you there," said Felboro, "and I'll wait till you have finished your business and take you home."

He showed Jim into the two-seater saloon and took his place at the steering-wheel. As the car emerged into the station yard it was raining a steady, persistent drizzle, and the streets were cloaked in a thin veil of yellow fog.

"Pleasant place to come back to—London," said his lordship. "I think a cigarette will make the drive endurable."

He stopped the car at the gates and pulled a case from his pocket. Jim accepted a cigarette gratefully, and held a match for his lordship before he lit his own.

"Pull up the window—it's a poisonous morning," said Felboro, and sent the car leisurely into Victoria Street.

They were half-way between the station and the Houses of Parliament when he asked a casual question of his companion. There was no answer, and glancing round Felboro saw that the young man's chin was on his chest; the cigarette, still smouldering, had fallen between his feet. He stooped and picked it up, threw it through the window, then, bringing the car round in a complete circle, increased the speed. Before the sombre entrance of 793, Grosvenor Gardens, he stopped, jumped out, looked left and right, then caught the unconscious man under the arms and dragged him across the pavement and up the stairs, depositing him against the door. Almost immediately it was opened by Tasker.

"My word, you've done it!" he said in horror, as he looked at the huddled figure.

"Don't talk, help me to carry him into the dining-room," said the other sharply,

"before an infernal policeman comes along."

Together they half-carried, half-dragged the messenger into Felboro's small study and laid him on the sofa.

"Go out and shut the door," ordered the master of the house.

The trembling Tasker returned in time to see his companion draw a thin package from the bosom of the drugged man.

"You've got the other envelope and the seals ready?" said Felboro. "Good! Now imitate this writing as closely as you can, whilst I see what is in the package."

He slit open the end and pulled out some twenty sheets of typewritten manuscript, turning the pages rapidly, and stopping only to jot down notes as they occurred to him.

"Here is the paragraph about the leases," he said. "Now we shall see——"

"Father!"

He looked up suddenly. The door had opened noiselessly and a girl's slim figure had appeared against the dark background of the hall. She was staring at the prostrate figure of Jim Selby.

"What is it? What have you done?" And then her eyes fell upon the papers on the table. "It is the Treaty!" she gasped. "The Treaty that Jim was bringing from Paris! Oh, father!"

"Get out!" Felboro's face was almost demoniacal in its fury. "Get back to your ——"

But she had already crossed the room and was kneeling by Jim's side, trying to revive him. Her father gripped her roughly by the arm and dragged her back.

"You fool, what are you trying to do? He'll never know that the package has been tampered with!" he hissed, "I'll take him to the Foreign Office and say he fainted——"

She was strangely quiescent, and moved obediently to his hand. Then, before he could realize what was happening, she had snatched the papers from the table and had thrust them into the front of her dress.

"You shan't see them, you shan't!" she said with passionate intensity. "Father, how could you!"

"Give me those papers!" cried Lord Felboro furiously.

"My dear young lady"—the quavering voice of Tasker was heard for the first time—"don't you realize that if this thing gets out, your poor father—"

"It's out, my boy; it's out!"

Felboro spun round at the voice. The door was open, but now the passage was brightly illuminated. He saw a figure, veiled and robed like a monk. Two eyes burnt through the slits of the hood which covered the Thing's face, and on his head glittered and sparkled a strange coronet the like of which he had never seen before. It was a coronet which had surmounted the helms of the knights of old, a thing of delicate gold work and flashing gems.

"Meet the Earl of Nowhere," said the cracked voice behind the mask. "John Lackland, Nemo..." He pointed a black-gloved finger at the speechless Lord of Felboro. "Give me back my lands and hereditaments, my broad manors, my woodlands, and houses great and small, thief and double thief!"

Whatever Lord Felboro lacked, it was not courage. His hand dropped to his pocket, but before he could close upon the grip of his automatic, something long and black and sinister covered his heart.

"Don't move, my robber-baron! Those papers." He took them gently from the girl's outstretched hand. "Stand against the wall."

The men obeyed as he slipped the papers back into the folder and scribbled bold, irregular characters across the face: "Stolen but unread," and added his sprawling signature. Then, with a strength which surprised the girl, he stooped and lifted the drowsy man to his feet, and before they realized what had happened, had disappeared. They heard the slam of the front door, followed by the whir of engines. When Felboro rushed out, car and man had gone.

II. THE HOLD-UP

LORD FELBORO stood by the window of his library, looking out upon the gloomy street with a frown upon his face. Night was falling, and the wet pavements reflected the gleam of the lamps. The library was in darkness, save for the red glow of the fire which burnt in the silver grate. Presently he turned slowly and addressed the unprepossessing man who sat huddled in a deep armchair, his fingers beating a nervous tattoo upon the padded arm.

"My dear Tasker," he said, in his suave, even tone, "you are rattled! And when you are rattled, you are a fool—a child, who starts at every creak of the floor and the howl of every gust of wind that comes down the chimney. 'The Earl of Nowhere' is probably Mr. William Sikes."

"He doesn't write like a burglar," growled the other fearfully. "I don't like it, Felboro—"

"Thanks to the spread of popular education," said Lord Felboro coolly, "even burglars can compose letters and inscribe them in a fair round hand. Personally, I take no notice of anonymous letter-writers, and less notice when they describe themselves by a title which is extinct. I tell you I knew Saltesh very well indeed. He died unmarried and without legal issue. I was the trustee of his estate: who should know better?"

"You were such a mighty good trustee that there's no estate left," growled Sir Charles Tasker. "That is why he's after you, Felboro."

Lord Felboro laughed quietly.

"Then why doesn't he come into the open? If he thinks that I have robbed him, there are the law courts: I understand that they still function. No, my dear fellow, you're crazy. And as for the Earl of Nowhere, whose face has not been seen, who has neither lawyer nor banker, nor, for the matter of that, identity, he is in all probability a vulgar blackmailer, and having a dim idea that I helped myself to the Saltesh property and dissipated the mythical thousands, thinks to frighten me into paying."

Sir Charles's lips curled in a sneer.

"Don't let us pretend to one another, Felboro," he said. "You had every penny that old Saltesh left; you squandered it at Monte Carlo and Deauville, to say nothing of a few score of race-tracks all over the country. You'd be in a devil of a mess if there was an heir to the Saltesh title."

Lord Felboro did not speak for a while, slowly pacing the room, his hands in his pockets, his chin on his breast.

"We will leave Saltesh out of the question for the moment," he said at last. "The point is, are you going to help me on Wednesday?"

"No!" The word was almost shouted, and again his lordship laughed.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of many things," said Tasker, in a grating tone. "I'm afraid about

that Selby.... Yes, you can laugh, but the Government are not going to take that lying clown. You can't drug and kidnap a King's Messenger without a come-back."

"I hate your cheap American slang," said Felboro calmly, helping himself to a cigarette from the silver box on the table. "There has already been a come-back, as you call it. I have had detective officers in this very room, questioning me as to where I left Jim Selby after I met him at Victoria Station; and I told them that, as we drove along Victoria Street, he asked if he could get out of the car and walk, and that was the last I saw of him."

Again Tasker's lips curled.

"They didn't suggest, by any chance, that you drugged Selby, brought him here and took the dispatches he was carrying, did they?" he sneered. "Do you think they don't know, Felboro?"

Lord Felboro chuckled.

"They were quite satisfied with my explanation," he said. "And now, are you going to help me?"

Tasker, the weaker man of the two, hesitated. He was, as his host never failed to remind him, in the same boat as Lord Felboro. They were two ruined men, their chief assets the title one inherited, the other bought in the days of his prosperity, and they were in urgent need of money.

"My dear, good fellow," Felboro continued, shrewdly scanning his companion in the half-light, and judging rightly that he was wavering, "if it comes to a showdown—I am now employing one of your favourite American expressions—in other words, if all the past is known, if the truth, not only about Saltesh, but a dozen little adventures in which you and I have participated, is exposed in cold print, what do you imagine will be the consequence? You and I have been Ali Baba, Dick Turpin, and all the discreditable fraternity of robbers rolled into one. We have lived by swindling, by cold-blooded thieving, and by almost every sort of crook work, for the past ten years—let us face the facts. You were rather anxious to do so a few minutes ago."

Sir Charles Tasker looked round nervously at the door.

"Vyvan is not in," said his lordship, slightly amused, "and if she were in, you may be sure that she would not betray me. One's child is loth to do that sort of thing, from a purely selfish point of view, perhaps, since the discredit which would come to me must inevitably be reflected upon her. I am being pressed for money; I need enormous sums to save me from bankruptcy."

"Why not go through the courts and end it? I'm thinking of doing so myself," growled Sir Charles.

"You're a fool," said the other contemptuously. "There is greater honour to be gained at the Old Bailey than in Carey Street by my code. And, besides, who is going to suspect me? And if they suspect me, who is going to dare put the law in motion without positive proof? My house in Grosvenor Gardens is as morally impregnable as was the old robber-baron's castle in the material sense."

In the silence which followed, the ticking of the little clock on the mantel-shelf came distinctly to the worried baronet.

"You can call it robbery, if you like."

"But this is robbery—bare faced—and I'm not in it. If you think I'm going to take a risk—"

"I shall be taking all the risk you're likely to take, my friend," said Felboro impatiently. "Do you imagine I am going to ask you to don a mask, or that I shall put a pistol in your hand and say, 'Go along and hold up the Rex Faston dinner-party'?"

Sir Charles looked at him suspiciously.

"Who are you going to get to do the dirty work?" he asked curiously.

The answer to his question was well timed. There was a knock at the door, and Felboro's shabby butler came into the room.

"Will you see Mr. Philip, sir?"

"In here," said his lordship curtly, and, when the servant had gone:

"Philip?" Tasker frowned. "Who the devil is he? Not—not Philip, the footman, from the Folly Club?" he gasped.

Lord Felboro nodded, and before the other could reply, the tall figure of the immaculate Philip appeared in the doorway.

"Don't go, Tasker. Come in, Philip, please, and sit down."

The footman came suspiciously into the room and looked from one to the other.

"Your lordship sent for me. I could not come before."

"I did not expect you before, Philip," said Lord Felboro suavely. And then,

with scarcely a break, he asked: "When were you in prison last, Philip?"

The man started, and his brows met.

"In prison, my lord?" he faltered.

"You have been in prison several times," said Lord Felboro. "I think the last occasion was some four years ago. You have been in prison because you have not had proper direction."

Philip was silent.

"I thought nobody knew of my past," he said at last.

"It is nothing to be ashamed of," said his lordship, as he smilingly handed a box of cigars to the visitor. "There is only one crime I recognize, and that is the crime of being caught."

He saw Tasker's look of horrified warning, but proceeded.

"For the sake of a few paltry pounds you have been to penal servitude. Had been directed as I would have directed you, my dear Philip, you would not only have escaped penal servitude, but you would not now be a poor man, dependent upon the tips which the Folly members bestow upon you." He smiled cynically at the younger man.

"Precious few they are!" said the footman.

"Exactly. I am now going to put up a job for you, and I can do so without the slightest reservation, because, supposing that you wished to carry a story to the police, who on earth would take your word against mine? That is the great advantage of the position I occupy, Philip—my credibility. Your word, on the other hand, with your unfortunate record behind you, would never for a moment be believed. So you see"—he was addressing Tasker as much as the man—"I take absolutely no risk in putting before you a plan which I have most carefully thought out, and which, I think, will result in your enrichment—er—our mutual benefit."

Philip stood, twisting his hat in his hands, his eyes on the carpet, and Felboro watched him closely.

"I don't know whether your lordship is joking," he began, in a hesitant voice, "but if you're not—and there's big money—"

"Sit down," said Lord Felboro, and, head to head, they talked in low tones for the greater part of an hour.

Captain Jim Selby, King's Messenger, listened with amazement and concern as the bearded chief of the Criminal Intelligence Department gave his cold-blood version of a recent unpleasant adventure. He had arrived from Paris carrying important dispatches, and had been met at the station by a member of the peerage, who had offered to drive him to his house. Half-an-hour later, Jim Selby had been awakened by a policeman. He was sitting on the snow-covered steps of the Treasury in Whitehall.

"If Felboro drugged me with a cigarette," he said in bewilderment, "why on earth did he leave my dispatches? I had nothing else of value."

"That is what baffles me," said Superintendent Steel; "but there is no doubt whatever that Lord Felboro, in spite of his position, is a crook of crooks. He has a bad history."

"But Felboro is a rich man—" began

Jim, and then, as a horrible thought flashed through his mind: "His daughter—Lady Vyvan—she is not—"

He could not bring himself to put his fears into words, and was ridiculously elated when the superintendent shook his head.

"No, Lady Vyvan isn't in it, poor girl! As to Lord Felboro being a rich man—" He laughed. "Felboro has been a crook for the past fifteen years, to my knowledge, but has worked in such a clever way that he has left no loophole for us to grab him. He deals, but not exclusively, in big Stock Exchange swindles, and when he descends to stealing—and he has before now—if he does not steal diamonds or gold or precious stones, he takes something more valuable—information!"

"Information?" repeated the puzzled Jim.

The officer nodded.

"That is why he got, or tried to get, your dispatches. I understand they contained particulars of a new treaty, which has already affected the oil market."

"Then Felboro has benefited by reading the treaty?"

The officer shook his head,

"My own impression is that he had no time to read it I've spent two days tracking the oil operators, and I cannot connect him, directly or indirectly, with the big bear movement which started on the afternoon of your arrival in

London. My own theory is that Felboro made a mess of things: he either hadn't time to read the treaty through, or to grasp its significance thoroughly. No, the big operator in oil is a mysterious gentleman named Smith, of Tonbridge. Who he is, heaven knows."

Jim smiled.

"Perhaps the Earl of Nowhere," he suggested, and to his surprise Superintendent Steel took his suggestion seriously.

"It may be," was his reply, but he refused to be drawn any further.

Jim Selby went out of Scotland Yard, his head in a whirl, and made his way towards the rendezvous that Vyvan had appointed in the scrawled note which he had received that morning.

Felboro a thief! He knew him for a gambler; he knew, too, that the man and his boon companion had been associated together in certain questionable transactions which had brought them to the very edge of the law. Men in his position could do, and sometimes did, shady things. He knew a cadet of a noble house who was spoken of as a cardsharp, but that Felboro could be a criminal seemed incredible.

He saw the girl sitting in one of the garden chairs that lined the deserted path near the pond, and thought at first that she had not seen him, for she did not raise her eyes even when he sank down in a chair by her side. If she knew! His one thought was how she might be spared the shock of knowledge. On this point he was determined: he must find some way by which she could be removed from the sinister association of her evil parent.

"Jim, do you know that my father is a thief?"

The question took Jim Selby's breath away. The pale, watery sunlight, which all the morning had gleamed reluctantly and at intervals through the racing cloud-rack, caught the girl's pale face as she turned to ask the question, and threw deeper shadows beneath the fine eyes which had not closed in sleep for two nights.

He would have turned the question with a jest, but there was something in Vyvan Sanclair's face which checked the smile that he forced to his lips.

"What a question to ask!" he began; but she stopped him.

"Jim, you came from Paris the other morning carrying dispatches. Father met you at the station and brought you home. Whether he drugged you in the car or after you came to the house, I do not know, but you were unconscious when I

saw you—"

"You saw me?" he said in astonishment; and she nodded.

"He robbed you, or tried to rob you, my dear." Her hand sought his. "That is true, isn't it?"

He did not answer, and she went on:

"Father is a thief, Jim—isn't it horrible! The last lord of Felboro, with our traditions behind him!"

"You're probably mistaken." He tried again to turn the subject, but she smiled faintly.

"I'm leaving him after to-night—my aunt has asked me to stay with her. I should have gone this afternoon, but father says—Do you know Rex Faston?" she asked.

Everybody knew, or knew of, Rex Faston. He was the one war millionaire whom peace had further enriched. He had dabbled in steel, in ships, cotton, munitions and exchanges, and had climbed out of every market with an enlarged fortune. A hopeless little vulgarian, with a passion for display, he had purchased a ducal town house, where he entertained on a scale that would have abashed Heliogabalus. It was Rex who gave a dance and spent eight thousand pounds on floral decorations alone. Mrs. Rex carried on her plump person a fabulous fortune in pearls alone, and her emeralds were accounted the finest collection in the world. And she generally wore them all on great occasions.

"I know Rex and Mrs. Rex," said Jim with a wry face. "I met the lady in Paris last winter—she had everything on except the kitchen stove."

Vyvan nodded.

"Were dining there to night—and father insisted that I should go. Mr. Faston expects a royal personage, though father says that nobody of importance will be there. It is rather curious, because I met Mrs. Faston this morning, and she gave me to understand that father was bringing Prince Cyril. Her husband has invited all the rich and impossible people he knows. He wants to—"

"Cut a shine?" suggested Jim, when she paused. "Poor dear! And you have to go?"

"And you," she said quietly.

"I? Heavens, no! I'm not invited. Besides, I don't want to meet—" He stopped

suddenly.

"My father? But you must! I have a horrible feeling that something is going to happen, and I want you there. I asked Mrs. Faston if you might come. I—I told her you were a friend of the prince's!" Jim's jaw dropped. "It doesn't matter—he won't be there," she went on quickly. "Oh, Jim, you must come! I know there is trouble coming. Father is desperate. All sorts of people have been calling at the house for money."

That night, when Vyvan was dressing for dinner, his lordship went out into the dark courtyard behind his house, opened a door that led into a mews, and ushered his visitor into his little study.

"I had a job getting away from the club to-night," grumbled Philip. "If your lordship had only written a word or two—"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Lord Felboro. "Do you think I wanted my name associated with your actions?"

Philip grinned.

"I see—you were scared in case I got caught, eh? Now look here, my lord, I'm not going to do this job until you make me safe!"

Felboro's brows met.

"What do you mean?" he asked with deadly quiet. "There will be no risk. I have given you the key of the gate which will admit you into the little garden. The dining-room is on the ground floor; the french windows you can easily force, and the car will be waiting—you can drive a car?"

Philip nodded.

"That will be waiting at the corner of the street."

"What about the 'busies'?" asked Philip.

"The detectives? They will be at the front of the house. Faston never has them inside. You ought to make your getaway easily."

"But suppose I don't?" said the other doggedly. "You spouted a lot this morning about nobody taking my word and everybody taking yours. That's not good enough for me, my lord. I want it down in black and white that you and me are in this job on equal shares."

Lord Felboro stared at him, and then a smile dawned on his face.

"All right," he said with a shrug, and, sitting down at his desk, he pulled a sheet of paper from the rack and wrote, under the suspicious eyes of the footman:

It is agreed that Philip, Lord Felboro and Sir Charles Tasker are equally concerned in the hold-up at Mr. Rex Faston's house, and that the proceeds shall be equally divided.

He signed it with a flourish, "Felboro," dried the paper before the fire, folded it neatly and put it into an envelope, closing down the flap.

"Will you listen at the door? I thought I heard my daughter's voice," he asked and as Philip walked to the door, Felboro slipped a folded sheet of blank paper into the second envelope he had taken from the rack and, moistening the flap with his forefinger, sealed it. The thing was done so quickly that Philip was hardly at the door before the first envelope had passed to the inside pocket of Felboro's dress coat, and the blank substitute lay invitingly on the blotting-pad.

"I hear nobody," said Philip.

He took up the letter, turning it over in his hand.

"I will put a seal on the back," said Lord Felboro, "and I trust to you to return it with the seal unbroken as soon as the job is over and the loot divided."

The man seemed satisfied, and, with the envelope in his pocket, followed his lordship to the back of the house.

Mr. Rex Faston's house in Park Lane was one of the largest and stateliest in that distinguished thoroughfare. It had on one side a tiny garden large enough for a lime-tree to grow unhindered by bricks and mortar. Mr. Faston seldom showed his visitors the garden, confining himself to escorting them from one magnificent room to another, impressing them with the cost of the marble staircase, the wonderful expensiveness of the rare wood paneling, and the amazing value of the picture gallery which he had acquired with the house.

He was a short, red-faced man, somewhat rotund, and his English was not of the best. He was explaining to other stout and red-faced men and their buxom consorts his disappointment at the prince's non-arrival, when Lord Felboro and his daughter arrived. But for Felboro's title and the position he was supposed to hold, Mr. Faston's tone would have been a little more vicious and his manner colder, for even the presence of an earl, supported by the vague distinction of a King's Messenger and Sir Charles Tasker, did not wholly compensate for the missing guest.

"I say, Felboro, old boy," he greeted his guest, "that was 'orrible news you telephoned to me, 'is royal 'ighness not being able to come, and all my friends 'ere was expectin' 'im. Are you sure he'll come later?"

"He's pretty certain to drop in," said Felboro glibly. He hesitated. "There was a dinner-party at the palace, and he couldn't get away."

He glanced round approvingly at the company, met Jim Selby's stern glance with a smile and a nod as though they were the best friends in the world, and continued his examination of the ladies' adornments. There was not one of these women who did not carry sufficient jewels on her person to keep the most extravagant-minded of men in luxury for a year. Here was a haul the like of which no hold-up man had seen.

Soothing his host's disappointment as well as he could, he remarked casually upon the danger in which the guests stood.

"Burglars? Not on your life!" said Faston scornfully. "There's a couple of detectives knocking about, but I don't allow them in the 'ouse—they look common, Felboro, and commonness I can't stand."

Jim had made his way to Vyvan, and drew her into a quiet corner of the ornate drawing-room.

"Do you still think something is going to happen to-night?" he asked.

She nodded.

"I feel sure. Father's been so nervy all day, and he locked himself up in his study to-night before we came out, and that is always a bad sign. Have you a revolver?"

He lifted his eyebrows, and laughed.

"I'm so sorry," he apologized. "My dear, of course I haven't. What can happen?" he said more gently, when he saw the look of distress in her face. "Surely you're not expecting a visit from the Earl of Nowhere?"

"If I were only expecting that I should be happy," she said, and made no further reference to her premonition.

Just after the butler announced that dinner was served, Sir Charles Tasker found time for a word with his chief.

"I'm scared as hell," he grunted under his breath. "What did you want to bring me here for?"

"I'll tell you," said the other in the same tone. "If any of the women scream, get to the door. There's a little bolt just underneath the lock. You won't see it unless you look for it. Shoot the bolt—you needn't let anybody see you doing it."

Tasker went red and white.

"What—what!" he spluttered, but Felboro had already turned away from him.

Nothing unusual happened during the dinner. The sweets were served, coffee and cigarettes had ended an over-elaborate meal, and the footmen had retired, when Jim, looking up suddenly, saw Lord Felboro take his watch from his pocket, glance at and replace it almost instantly. From Felboro his eyes ranged the table till they rested on Tasker. The man was livid, the hand that raised a wine glass to his lips trembled violently. Jim was all alert. What was to happen, and when? He was not left long in doubt.

Crash!

The french windows behind him were jerked violently apart, and open-mouthed, silent, the glittering company watched the black-masked figure that appeared. In one black-gloved hand he carried an automatic pistol, the other was raised to enjoin silence.

"No shouts, no squeaks, no squeals," he chuckled. "Meet the Earl of Nowhere, everybody! Come here, you!"

His finger crooked to the white-faced Felboro.

"Come, robber chief, ravisher of broad lands, destroyer of inheritances!"

Compelled by the magnetic quality of the voice, Felboro rose slowly and walked towards the mask. And then suddenly the hand of the "Earl of Nowhere" shot out. Before Felboro could realize what had happened, the hand was in his pocket; and when it was withdrawn, it held a square envelope.

"No jewels, no ropes of greasy pearls, my fat-faced profiteer!" chortled the man in the mask, and in a moment was gone.

Philip—Philip! It was impossible, impossible! Felboro, burning with rage, leant out of the door of the taxicab that was carrying him to Grosvenor Gardens, and cursed the driver for his slowness.

The burglar-footman would not turn traitor—it was impossible! He threw a coin to the driver and flew into the house. Philip had arranged to meet him in his study immediately after the robbery, and the entrance from the mews had

been left open for the purpose. Unlocking the door, he threw it wide and switched on the light. As he did so, he uttered an exclamation of amazement, a hoarse cry. For, lying on the floor, his wrists handcuffed, his arms and legs strapped and a heavy cloth tied over his mouth, lay Philip.

In a second Felboro had loosened the bonds and torn away the gag, and the face of the footman stared up at him.

"Just as I was going into the garden in Park Lane somebody caught hold of me and shoved a wet towel on my face, and I don't remember much more."

He put his manacled hand into his pocket vaguely and took out the "letter" which Felboro had given him. The seal was still intact. Felboro snatched it from his hand and ripped it open. Perhaps by some miraculous mistake this was the damning document he had signed, and the blank had been taken by the masked intruder. With trembling fingers he took out the paper. At first he thought it was blank, and then he saw, written on one corner, in violet ink:

I am adding your confession to my dossier.

There followed a roughly-drawn earl's coronet and a capital "N."

III. THE POST-OFFICE CLERK

THE Rugarian Minister gave a dinner and dance in honour of his sovereign's birthday, and the big house in Portman Square was filled with the élite of London society. The curious crowd which stood on the pavement were kept clear of the cover which the red awning stretching to the kerb afforded, and watched the glittering arrivals and cheered in a half-hearted fashion the popular minister, whose duty brought him to the reception.

Detective-Inspector Bennett, on duty in the big hall, saw a familiar figure wearing on his coat the glittering insignia of a Rugarian order, and became instantly alert. The Earl of Felboro handed his crush hat and his coat to an attendant, mechanically smoothed his hair, and strolled up the hall towards the stairs that led to the drawing-room. Suddenly his eyes caught the detective's, and he nodded.

"Good evening, Mr. Bennett," he said. "You're keeping an eye on Mr. Vereski's diamonds, one hopes?"

"Yes, my lord," said Inspector Bennett with a smile.

"Stout fellow," said his lordship, and went slowly up the stairs.

Bennett jerked his chin upwards and a guest in evening dress who had been lounging in the hall came towards him.

"Follow Felboro; don't leave him out of your sight."

"Lord Felboro?" said the other in surprise.

"Lord Felboro," said Bennett emphatically. "You're not likely to see a bigger crook in Portman Square to-night."

"Good lord!" gasped his subordinate, to whom this was news indeed. "What—the Earl of Felboro—a crook?"

"Follow him," said the other tersely, "and keep him under observation."

Nobody knew better than Inspector Bennett how dangerous a man this good-looking nobleman was, and how insuperably difficult was the task of countering his many enterprises. Scotland Yard knew him to be associated with some of the worst gangs of swindlers in Europe. Society knew him as a man with an unenviable reputation, and guessed all that Scotland Yard suspected. But suspicion was one thing, knowledge another. A false move might ruin the highest-placed police official, and an indiscreet word of condemnation might cost the boldest of society men just as much money as a jury would award for libel.

Lord Felboro might not be received in the Royal Enclosure, but so many people were under a similar ban: and society found no excuse for barring him from their entertainments. Outwardly he was a polished, charming gentleman; he certainly had the privilege of calling the prettiest girl in London daughter. There were many glances of covert unfriendliness turned towards him as he strolled up to the minister and shook hands, but he was too dangerous a man for the majority of people to offend openly.

Lady Vyvan Sanclair was standing in the corner of the room talking to Jim Selby when her father appeared, and the smile left her face.

"I didn't know my father would be here," she said.

Jim was looking round.

"Where is his unspeakable friend?"

In these unflattering terms he spoke of Felboro's shadow, but the podgy little Sir Charles Tasker had not been invited.

"Is your father interested in Rugarian politics?" asked Jim.

She shook her head.

"I don't know; I don't think so," she said.

"I wonder why he's here," he said thoughtfully.

He might have added that he saw nothing to be gained for Lord Felboro out of this social function, but he would not run the risk of hurting her feelings.

She took his arm and led him into an anteroom, and found a settee in one of the corners, partially secluded from view.

"I want to talk very seriously to you, Jim," she said, "and it's about this terrible man, the Earl of Nowhere."

He chuckled.

"I almost said I'm tired of hearing about the Earl of Nowhere," he said. "In fact, I dare not go to a fancy dress ball for fear I see a black mask appear from his ancestral home, which I understand is really the bottomless pit!"

"Be serious," she said. "You know, of course, my father was trustee of the Saltesh estate? The old earl died without issue, and father administered the property."

"Yes, there was no property to administer, according to your father's statement. He was the nearest friend of Lord Saltesh and was in his confidence, and, according to him, he had known all along that the estate was insolvent. This mysterious man claims to be the heir to the title and the non-existent property."

She nodded.

"Father had a letter from him this morning: I saw it when I went into his study. It contained the most dreadful accusations; said that father had gambled away half a million pounds belonging to the writer! There was a long list of the various estates which this mysterious man said father had sold, with a price against each, and the date on which they were disposed of. And it finished up: I am conferring upon you the Earldom of Dartmoor, and within a month you will take up your position at your new family seat."

"What did your father say?" asked Jim.

He came in and saw me reading the letter. He seemed amused; and yet I couldn't help feeling that behind his smile there was a—fear.

"Of course, it's all bunkum," laughed Jim. "I haven't a very good opinion of your father, but I don't imagine that Saltesh left a penny."

"You're wrong, Jim. Something father told me later leaves no doubt in my mind that there were these estates. And then I had a very serious talk with him at lunch. He said that there might be somebody who thought they had a right to the Saltesh estate, that there was a little money to go to the heir, and that he was going to bank it, in case there was a legal claim."

"What does that mean?" asked Jim.

"I don't know, I can't think. All that I know is that at the moment father has no money to bank at all! You know, dear, he is an inveterate gambler, and every penny he gets goes that way."

She was silent for a moment, and he asked:

"What do you—guess?"

"That father is terrified; that these continuous threats have so got on to his mind and have so terrified him that he intends getting the money by hook or by crook, so that he may have it on the day the claim is made. His confidence seems to be shaken by the information which this mysterious person has."

Jim whistled.

"Half a million wants getting," he said, very truly.

So thought Lord Felboro. When he returned to his house that night he found Sir Charles Tasker dozing in a chair before the fire, and roused him by the simplest expedient of kicking his foot as he passed. The little man blinked himself awake.

"Hallo!" he growled, a scowl on his unprepossessing face. "I've been waiting here since ten." He looked at the clock over the mantelpiece. "It's one now. You told me ten——"

"If I'd told you six, you'd have been here, my dear fellow," said his lordship, helping himself to a whisky and soda. "I've been to Vereski's reception."

"Well?"

"The famous Vereski diamonds were on view, as also were the notorious Vereski emeralds. They adorned the portly person of his good lady. I was scared that they had already been sent to Rugaria."

Sir Charles grunted something.

"On the contrary, it was very interesting," said his lordship, as he drained the glass and set it down on the table, "and in a way amusing. Bennett from Scotland Yard was there; he put a man on to trail me—he was never more than a foot away from me throughout the evening. I want those stones, Tasker."

"You're a fool," spluttered the other. "Burglary is not in your line. What did you want to go and see them for?"

"To make sure they were in London—and let me add that anything is in my line," said Felboro coolly.

"You can count me out," grunted Sir Charles.

"I have already counted you out, my friend, though I shall need your help. You have a smuggling friend who returns to America on Saturday. He can take the stones with him."

The other glared up at him.

"What's the good of that kind of game?" he asked. "Do you imagine you could sell the jewels in the open market? And if they went to one of these fellows who deal in stolen property——"

"Fence' is the word you want," said Lord Felboro. "I shouldn't get a twentieth of their value—I know all about that. And believe me, my dear Charles, I do not intend going to a fence. Stones, taken from their mounts and added to a few others, could be smuggled into America and would fetch top price. There's from a hundred thousand to two hundred thousand pounds for the asking. Pull yourself together and then come down to the club: I believe there's an all-night session, and I should like to introduce you to a counter-revolutionary who has been my guest there since eight o'clock this evening."

"I don't want to go to the club," growled the little man. "Do you realize we've put ourselves in the power of that cursed footman? And what's this rubbish about revolutions?"

Lord Felboro laughed softly, but did not answer the latter part of the question.

"Philip? My dear man, an ex-convict wields very little power. The criminal classes are notorious liars, and even the credulous Mr. Bennett would place very little reliance upon any statement that Philip made."

"He bungled the last business——" began Sir Charles.

"Not he, but we. Let us give him credit. He is a reliable man, and we may yet find him useful. Come along, my car is at the door."

Grumbling, the baronet followed his host into the street and shiveringly buttoned his coat to his neck, for the night was cold and raw.

At the Frivolity Club the festivities were at their height. The dancing floor was almost ankle deep in confetti; streamers hung from the chandeliers; and the revellers were in that stage of exhilaration which is so difficult to distinguish from the more sordid varieties of intoxication.

Lord Felboro stood in the doorway, his quick eyes scanning the people in the room. And then the band struck up, and the couples left their tables to fill the floor, and with this thinning-out process he saw the man he sought. It was a young man in an ill-fitting evening suit that looked as though it had been made for somebody else, and he sat aloof from the cheery throng at a small table placed in a corner of the room. Apparently he was quite satisfied with his isolation, for he beamed stupidly upon the gay throng as it wove a pattern of kaleidoscopic colour across the limited dancing space.

"That's our man," said Felboro, and, threading his way through the dancers, he came to the lonely occupant of the table.

A paper cap was askew on his head, and a grotesque paper cravat was tied about his throat. He looked up with a foolish smile as Felboro and his companion came.

"Hallo, my lord!" he said, and made a blundering attempt to rise.

"Sit down, Dempster," said Felboro. "You haven't any wine. Tut, tut, this will never do. I told the head waiter to keep you supplied with anything you wanted."

"You've been simply topping to me, my lord!" said the young man enthusiastically. "I've never had such an evening in my life. Mind you, they're a bit standoffish here, and when I asked one of these girls to dance, the fellow who was with her looked at me as though he'd cut my throat for fourpence!"

"Perhaps you have to bring your own dancing partners to places like this," said Felboro good-humouredly. "Still, you're enjoying yourself?"

"It's ripping," said the other. "I'll have something to tell the fellows about at the office!"

"You haven't danced, eh?"

Lord Felboro fumbled his chin and took a swift glance round the hall. Presently he saw a girl whom he knew, and, going across to her, whispered a few words. She smiled and, rising, preceded him back.

"I want to introduce Mr. Dempster, Miss Dail," said Felboro. "I'm sure Miss Dail would give you a dance."

"Why, of course," said the girl, and led the stammering young man out on to the floor.

"Who the devil is he?" asked Sir Charles, gazing at the vacuous youth as he piloted his partner with some skill.

"His name is Dempster; he is a clerk in the post office, and it is his job to keep a record of all the heavily insured registered packages which go out of this country to the Continent," said Felboro slowly. "In fact, he not only prepares the waybill, but he seals the bag. I met him some time ago through a friend of mine."

"But what's the idea?" asked Sir Charles, when the other paused.

"The Rugarian minister returns to the Balkans to-morrow. He had a telegram this morning—rather, yesterday morning—calling him into consultation. He will be abroad for six months." Lord Felboro spoke rapidly, lowering his voice. "Madame Vereski invariably transports her jewellery through the post, since she had her case stolen a few years ago. To-morrow a registered package will come to Mr. Dempster and will be dealt with in the usual way."

"And you will be in the office and ring the changes?" suggested Sir Charles, and in spite of his annoyance Felboro laughed.

"You're a fool! Suppose I did, and the stones were missing, do you think the inquiry wouldn't embrace me? No; my plan is very much more simple. To-morrow afternoon the stones will be taken to the G.P.O., handed over the counter, and sent by special messenger to Dempster's room. They will be placed in the bag and apparently forwarded. I say 'apparently' because the package addressed to the Rugarian Foreign Office will be brought to my house by Dempster," he said coolly.

The other's jaw dropped.

"Are you serious?"

"Quite serious," he said.

Tasker saw a warning glance in his companion's eyes, and the next minute the young man came back. For a while no conversation was possible; but when another man had claimed the girl and taken her away to dance, the three were left alone and Lord Felboro immediately turned the conversation in the direction he had carefully chosen.

"Well, Dempster, have you got any farther with your investigations?"

The young man's face instantly assumed an air of sobriety.

"Yes, my lord," he said, "I have got proof now that the revolution is timed for the fourteenth of December."

"Revolution?" croaked Tasker in surprise, when a warning glance from the other stopped him.

"Arms have been coming into this country by the thousand," the youth went on. "The Red Army is almost equipped, and on the day——"

"When will the day be?" asked Felboro anxiously.

Dempster shook his silly head.

"That I haven't been able to discover," he said gravely. "I only want that to expose the whole plot. If I could only find the mysterious power that is working behind the scenes——"

"Ah!" said Felboro, shook his head and sighed.

"You don't know?" asked the other eagerly. "Why, you guyed me the first time I spoke about the revolution."

"One doesn't betray oneself to a new acquaintance."

"Do you know who is the "Idden "And'?" In his agitation Mr. Dempster took great liberties with the Kings English.

"I know where this movement is being directed from," said Felboro slowly, "and I know that to-morrow a complete list of the chief conspirators, the stations and the secret orders, is going out of this country to the controlling power."

Sir Charles Tasker, who had sat dumbfounded through the conversation, began to see light. Mr. Dempster stared at his lordly host.

"I suppose, my lord, nothing would induce you to give me that information?"

The voice of the amateur detective was tremulous with anxiety; he was almost sober in the pursuit of his illusion.

Felboro looked left and right and lowered his voice.

"The chief conspirator is Monsieur Vereski, the Rugarian minister," he said. "I have been doing a little secret service work myself, and I know that he is

leaving the country hurriedly to-morrow, and that, in order that he should not be searched, he is sending all the information by post."

Mr. Dempster's face went red and while.

"Not registered?" he asked eagerly.

Felboro shook his head.

"That I haven't been able to discover."

"Suppose he does?" burred the young man. "Suppose it comes through me? Gosh! What a chance!"

"You wouldn't dare open it, it would be too risky," said Lord Felboro.

"Wouldn't I, though? I'd do anything for the dear old country," said the patriotic Mr. Dempster.

Felboro frowned, evidently deep in thought.

"You could get it away without anybody knowing, make an examination, take a copy of the documents, and then send them on as though nothing had happened—it might be done that way."

This Mr. Dempster considered.

"I could, with a little help," he said anxiously.

"I hate offering my assistance. The risk is so great, and I should be practically at your mercy." His lordship silenced the others protests of loyalty. "But I'll risk it. Bring the package to my house. . . . But suppose you're detected?"

Dempster went pale at the thought.

"I wouldn't care; I'd say nothing," he affirmed stoutly. "And it could be done."

"Phone me in the morning—yes or no," said his lordship at parting. "I will be waiting for you."

It was a very long time before Sir Charles Tasker could find his voice after the young man had gone.

"I don't know whether I'm awake or asleep. With such lunatics as this——"

"There are thousands of them, sometimes on the side of the revolutionaries and sometimes against them. They're prepared to believe any cock-and-bull story that's got a revolver and a bomb in it. Why, one of the biggest patriotic

societies in the country had a meeting the other day, and a public speaker said there were a hundred and twenty thousand armed Reds awaiting the signal to rise! And a million people believed him! This kind of obsession is as common as jazz."

"But suppose he squeaks?"

"He won't," said Felboro quickly. "I'll find a pretext for examining the contents of the package alone, and I'll report there's nothing there. When the parcel reaches its destination and it is found that the stones are gone, he'll be too scared to tell the part he's played, and may look upon it merely as a plot on the part of a Red enemy to ruin him."

"Can such fools exist?"

"There's one born every minute," said his lordship sententiously.

There was no doubt whatever that Lord Felboro was in a very serious frame of mind. The drip-drip of threats had worn a cavity in the stone of his complacency. There was no heir to the earldom of Saltesh: this he asserted in and out of season until he believed his own assertion. It was fairly clear that there existed somebody who sincerely believed in the honesty of his claim; and this mysterious person, who called himself the Earl of Nowhere, was most diabolically well informed. Felboro would take no risks. He might never be called upon to find the money, but this mystery man might produce proof, and in that case it would be an Old Bailey matter unless the money was in existence, even though Felboro promised himself that he would fight like the devil to retain its possession.

And there was a certain piquant novelty in stealing to save. Hitherto he had robbed to squander, and had lived alternately on the heights of prosperity and in the deep and gloomy valleys of poverty.

He was dressing next morning when the telephone bell rang, and he heard the agitated voice of his humble friend.

"The word is emphatically 'yes.' I've been thinking it over, your lordship, and _____"

"Don't talk so much on the wire," said Lord Felboro. "I will be waiting."

He did not give the young man a chance of speaking further, but hung up the receiver.

That he might involve this misguided youth in total ruin did not disturb him for a second. His only concern was with himself. He must cover his tracks so

effectively that, even though the authorities traced Dempster to his house, they could not connect him with the robbery he contemplated. And as to the Earl of Nowhere—he frowned. At least the Unknown was ignorant of this little scheme of his.

The excuse for Dempster's calling was not difficult to find. Lord Felboro had first met the young man when he had called at the house to collect a subscription towards a boys' club in which Dempster was interested, for he was a young man with a public spirit. And his lordship arranged that both the subscription card, which had been left with him, and his cheque, dated that day, and a little note which he wrote in the course of the afternoon, should go away with Dempster and should stand as sufficient reason for the visit.

It was five o'clock when the young man came. He was trembling with excitement, and no sooner had the study door closed than he whispered:

"I've got it! . . . directed to Vereski himself, and registered!"

"What did you do?"

"I put it on the waybill, but didn't send it in the bag. I can easily correct the mistake to-morrow. Here it is."

He brought out a flat, oblong package, heavily wrapped in white paper, taped and sealed, and laid it on the table. Lord Felboro looked at the package with a scientific eye.

"I think I can get this out without disturbing the seals," he said. "Will you excuse me a moment?"

He walked quickly into the little inner study and closed the door. The instruments he was likely to use he had laid out, and in five minutes he had opened the case, slipped out the jewels and dropped them in his pocket before he replaced the covering. So quick was he that when he came back to the expectant youth with the package apparently untouched, Dempster thought the parcel had not been opened.

"I've been thinking it over," said Felboro gravely, "and I've decided that, in your best interests, these seals ought not to be forced. The documents may be there; on the other hand, there may be something valuable, and it would be a very serious thing for you if that was so."

"Aren't you going to open it?"

Felboro shook his head.

"No: take my advice, my boy, get it back to the post office and send it on in the next bag."

Dempster was disappointed, but the older man converted him to his way of thinking.

"All right, my lord; I'm sure your advice is the soundest," he said.

"Here is your subscription card and my cheque." Felboro called him back to give him these necessary articles of evidence. "If anybody ever wants to know why you came here that was the reason—you understand?"

"Yes, my lord," said Dempster.

Felboro saw him off the premises, then walked up to his bedroom, locked the door, and, pulling out the two necklets, laid them on his dressing-table. They winked and glittered brilliantly in the light of the overhead lamps.

"You're beauties," he murmured, "but I've got to get rid of you without delay."

He had a small box all ready, and he packed away the gems in cotton wool, wrapped them up and, going into his dressing-room, found a piece of tape; returning, he tied up the package and sealed it. With this in his pocket he made his way to Tasker's house, and found that admirable man in such a state of terror that he was on the point of collapse.

He laid the package on the table and Sir Charles fingered it fearfully—he asked that it should be opened.

"I want to see what I'm sending," he said.

With a curse his lordship cut the tapes and took out the cardboard box. As he lifted the top layer of cotton wool, he sneered:

"Did you think I was double-crossing you?"

And then he stopped. The box was empty—empty save for a card on which was printed a coronet and the word "Nowhere!"

"A curious incident has occupied the attention of Scotland Yard," said the Daily Megaphone. "A registered package containing jewels of considerable value, forwarded to the capital of Rugaria, failed to arrive. Inquiries were telegraphed to London, and whilst the post office officials were investigating the matter, another wire came from Rugaria saying that the jewellery had arrived but in a different package. Inside the case which held them was a slip of paper inscribed: 'With the Compliments of the Earl of Nowhere.'"

IV. THE EDGWARE ROAD CRIME

PHILIP, the footman at the Frolic Club, was gazing pensively into the long and beautiful saloon when he heard a footstep on the marble pavement of the vestibule, and, turning round, met the cold scrutiny of Middlebrow. The tall, good-looking footman bowed as his lordship passed.

"Good morning, my lord," he said.

Lord Felboro turned back. Glancing round to see that he could not be overheard:

"You were once in very serious trouble, weren't you, Philip?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You were, in fact, a convict. I am told?"

"That is so, my lord," said Philip quietly.

"I want you to come to my place in Grosvenor Gardens this afternoon. I have a little job I should like you to do, though I don't remember that you were particularly successful the last time my—er—friends employed you."

"That was very unfortunate, my lord," said Philip.

Without another word his lordship walked into the dining-room, found a corner seat, and waited with some impatience for the arrival of his friend and confederate. When Sir Charles Tasker waddled in, there was on his unhealthy face a frown which Felboro recognized as a sign of the man's perturbation of mind.

"Have you seen that cursed newspaper?" was Tasker's first question.

"I have seen that cursed newspaper," said the other, smiling faintly. "You mean the Daily Megaphone—accursed for the moment because it has published a fantastical story about the Earl of Nowhere."

London had been agog over this same Earl of Nowhere for months past. He had appeared in a dozen extraordinary circumstances, and the newspaper which had set itself to investigate the wherefore of this strange apparition had discovered that every time the Earl of Nowhere had made his appearance it had been to the disadvantage of one man, and one man only—The Earl of

Felboro.

"I've got the paper in my pocket——" began Tasker.

"I have the cutting in mine," said his lordship. "According to this enterprising journal, the Earl of Nowhere is in reality the Earl of Somewhere. In other words, he is the heir to the Saltesh property, which I administer, and which he accuses me, not so much of maladministration as of having stolen the property and applied the proceeds of its sale to my own base purposes—very amusing, is it not, Tasker?"

"Do you call that amusing?" almost bellowed the baronet, as he took the paper from his pocket and laid it on the table before the other.

His lordship fixed his monocle and examined the marriage certificate that had been reproduced.

"It is probably a fake," he said. "You know what these newspapers are—they will do anything for sensation——"

"Suppose it isn't a fake?" demanded Tasker. "Suppose this is a reproduction of the genuine certificate, and that old Saltesh was secretly married to some infernal girl, then the heir—the paper prints his birth certificate—can come down on you for an account of your stewardship. That would be rather awkward."

"It would be more than awkward—it would be painful," said Lord Felboro. "But why hasn't he come into the light before? Why was it necessary for him to adopt this stupid disguise and make himself a nuisance to me?"

Tasker did not answer. Raising his eyes at that moment Lord Felboro saw a familiar figure come into the dining room.

"There's Selby," he said coolly. "He's rather clever at guessing riddles—I'll ask him over."

He smiled and beckoned Jim Selby, and Jim, who had had a very unhappy experience with the unscrupulous Lord Felboro, hesitated for a second, and then, curiosity getting the better of him, he walked across to where sat the two men whom, of all others, he most completely distrusted.

"Sit down, Selby. Have you seen my daughter this morning—by the way, she has been with you a great deal lately. I do hope that you're not going to get her talked about?"

"My dear Lord Felboro," said Jim blandly, "as if the scandal of being your

daughter would not outweigh any other which is likely to come her way! I have asked Vyvan to be my wife."

Felboro raised his eyebrows.

"In these matters," he said, a little irritably, "one usually consults the parents of one's fiancée."

"I didn't think it was worth a consultation," said Jim coolly. "The truth is, Lord Felboro, if you can bear the truth——"

"I will endeavour," murmured the other.

"Your name is not a particularly savoury one, and I thought I was acting in your best interests when I ignored you."

Felboro mastered his momentary rage with an effort and smiled.

"I wish you joy," he said ironically. "I had other plans for Vyvan, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"she and I have never been exactly en rapport." He looked at Jim long and thoughtfully, and then: "I brought you over to ask you something. Now what the devil was it?" In this manner did he dismiss the subject of his daughter's future, to which, if the truth be told, he had in that consideration given more thought than ever he had given in his life. Jim Selby was a man in comfortable circumstances; he was, moreover, the sole heir of an immensely rich uncle. He might be useful in the future, be decided. And as though he read his thoughts, Jim said quietly:

"This marriage, of course, will end our association, Lord Felboro. I hope you will never look upon me as a convenient son-in-law, because if you do you will be disappointed."

Again he was favoured with that cold stare.

"What the devil was it I wanted to see you about? Oh, I know! I was going to ask you what you thought of the revelations in this morning's Megaphone. I am starting an action for libel, of course."

Jim smiled.

"You would hardly be well advised, would you? There is no doubt that when the Earl of Saltesh died he left an heir to his property——"

"Why hasn't he come forward and claimed it?" growled Tasker. "That's what we want to know. What does he want to go monkeying about for, wearing masks and all that sort of thing?"

The solution of that mystery had already come to Jim.

"He wants his money back," he said, "And from what I've heard and what I

guess, he's got quite a lot. Suppose he had come demanding the fortune that his father had left, what chance would he have had of getting it? He might have had you arrested for defalcation, but it would be a question as to whether he would get a conviction. You're much too clever a man not to have covered your tracks. Instead, calling himself the Earl of Nowhere, he has appeared at very awkward times for you, and by this method has managed to bleed you, at any rate, of some of his money."

The other bit his lip thoughtfully.

"Yes, there is that," he said. "Such a solution has already occurred to me. Do you know who he is?"

Jim shrugged.

"The Earl of Nowhere? The Megaphone says that he is staying in a Bloomsbury flat, waiting the psychological moment to come forward and enter his claim to the estate. Apparently his mother, after his birth, took him to America, and there he remained in ignorance of his parentage till by an accidental discovery of some of his father's letters he learnt that he was the heir to the Saltesh estate."

"All rot!" interrupted the other impatiently. "That's what the newspaper says. But he'll have some trouble to establish his claim, and greater trouble to get from me what little money there is left."

"That I can well believe," said Jim as he rose to go.

Tasker waited until the King's Messenger was out of hearing, and then he turned to his companion.

"What are you going to do about this? Will you fight it?"

"In the courts?" asked Felboro contemptuously. "Am I mad? Of course, I will use every process of the law to keep this man at arm's length, and I shall oppose his claim right up to the last."

"And if it succeeds," sneered Tasker, "what will happen to you?"

His lordship lit a cigarette and sent a curl of smoke whirling to the ceiling before he spoke.

"He mustn't succeed," he said, and added: "I want you to be at Grosvenor Gardens this afternoon, not later than three."

"What is going to happen?" asked Sir Charles fearfully.

"I will tell you—then," was the unsatisfactory reply.

As he walked out of the club and got into his car he saw his daughter drive up in a taxi, and he had half a mind to stop and talk to her, but with a shrug of his

shoulders sank back into the luxurious depths of the padded seat and promptly erased her from his thoughts.

She was lunching with Jim that day, and was later than most guests usually are.

"I saw Father: he was driving off as I arrived," she said as she preceded Jim to the table he had reserved. "Is it true, what is in the newspapers?"

Jim nodded.

"I don't think there is any doubt about it," he said, "There is an Earl of Saltesh, and he intends claiming the estate which your father administered."

"But Father says there is no estate to claim."

"I don't suppose there is," said Jim dryly.

He might have added that with such a trustee as Lord Felboro the chance of the new earl coming into a substantial kingdom was a very remote one.

Vyvan made no further reference throughout the lunch to her father. She had no illusions about him; knew that he had been associated with more shady deals than any convicted swindler. He was one of the ugly facts of life that she must accept; and for a long time she had been aware that only his cleverness and the position he held in society had prevented his arrest in connection with half-a-dozen financial swindles which he had either engineered or in which he had conspicuously participated. The bearer of an honoured name, he had been crooked from his youth up. And that he had succeeded in winning the confidence of the Earl of Saltesh to such an extent that that elderly and dissolute man had made him his sole trustee, was not so much a tribute to his craft, which quality he did not lack, as to the sympathy that existed between these two men.

He was sitting in his study that afternoon at three o'clock when Tasker arrived. That stout man, seating himself uncomfortably on the edge of a chair, waited in some trepidation for Felboro to unfold his plan. But apparently his lordship was in no hurry to give his confidence.

"You'll have to wait a little while," he said. "I am expecting a visitor."

"Who is that?" asked Sir Charles uneasily.

"A man in the employ of the Megaphone newspaper," said Felboro. "I have always found, my dear Charles, that if you wish to get information from a great company, there are two sources which are infallible. The first of these is the head of the company, who is, as a rule, a very rich person. The second is any individual who has access to facts. A striking of this is to be found in the case of the young man in the registered letter department of the Post Office.

And although our scheme came to grief, my theory worked out excellently well. Now, if I wanted to discover the writer or inspirer of these articles in the Megaphone, and I went to the editor or to the proprietor of the newspaper, it is ninety-nine chances to one that I should be kicked out of the office. Newspaper editors have a very keen sense of their responsibilities. The Megaphone says that the real Earl of Saltesh is living in a flat in Bloomsbury—which means, of course, that he is doing nothing of the kind. That paragraph was merely put in as a blind, to throw any seeker off the track. Through my valet I have succeeded in getting into touch with a messenger at the Megaphone office, who not only knows where the particulars I require are filed, but has the means of getting in touch with them."

His explanation was interrupted by the footman announcing Mr. John Jennings, who proved to be a rather tall, broad-shouldered man of middle age.

Mr. Jennings had a red and bovine face, and displayed natural nervousness at the presence of a third person.

"That is quite all right, Jennings—sit down and have a cigar," said his lordship. "Sir Charles, here, is an old friend of mine, and you can speak with perfect freedom before him. Did you find what I wanted?"

"Yes, my lord," said the man.

"I've seen the original 'copy' as it came in from this man. He calls himself Wilkins, and he's staying at No. 16, Elmer Gardens, Edgware Road. That was the name on the letter attached to the 'copy'. I had an awful job getting it. All the old 'copy' on the Megaphone is kept in a special room on the linotype floor. Of course, I should lose my job if it was known what I had done."

"It will never be known. Wilkins, of 16, Elmer Gardens, Edgware Road." Lord Felboro wrote it down rapidly, "Splendid!"

He opened a little safe, took out three crisp notes, and handed them across to the gratified messenger, who was ushered from the room incoherent with gratitude.

"It is deliciously simple," said his lordship, after he had seen the man off the premises. "Fortunately, I know something about newspaper offices, and I knew that if the facts were communicated to the Megaphone, as obviously they were, the name of the informant would very likely be attached to the 'copy.' It was a simple matter getting in touch with this messenger man——"

"What are you going to do now?" asked Tasker.

"I will tell you in a few minutes. I have asked Philip to come here this afternoon."

"What do you want him to do?" asked Tasker apprehensively.

"I want him to get me those two certificates that are reproduced in this morning's newspaper, and more especially I wish him to get the letters from Saltesh to his wife, that the paper says are in his possession. I don't think it will be difficult. Here is Philip."

The door opened at that minute to admit the convict footman.

"I propose paying you ten thousand pounds for the services which I shall ask of you," said Lord Felboro slowly, and then outlined his plan, Philip listening intently.

"It seems easy, my lord," he said. "If this man lives at the address I can get into the house without much trouble. Are you sure the papers are there?"

For answer Lord Felboro took the cutting from his pocket and read:

The letters which prove beyond doubt the identity of the Earl of Saltesh, and support the story of this romantic secret marriage, are in the earl's possession and never leave him day or night.

Philip nodded.

"If that is true, you can reckon on having those papers to-night," he said. "When do I get paid?"

"The moment they are placed in my hand I will keep my promise," said Felboro.

It was eleven o'clock. The hour had just struck from a local church, and Tasker, who had spent an agonizing two hours in the little study, suddenly jumped to his feet.

"How are you going to pay him?"

"In instalments," was the cool reply. "I've got less than three thousand pounds on the premises, and perhaps he'll get a thousand on account—if he's lucky."

Half-past eleven struck—twelve—and then, when Felboro had given up hope of seeing his agent, and Tasker had put on and taken off his greatcoat for the tenth time, there came a gentle knock at the door. Felboro had left the study door open, and had sent the servants to bed, and it was he who turned the knob noiselessly to admit the visitor.

Philip was in a hurry.

"Shut that door quick!" he grunted.

"What's wrong—are they after you?" asked Felboro, with an unaccustomed flutter at his heart.

"No, not yet. There's something I want to tell you."

Felboro followed him into the study. One glance at Philip told him that something was very badly wrong.

"Have you got the letters?" he asked.

"No," growled the man, and Felboro's heart sank.

"Couldn't you find them?"

"Yes, I found them; they were on the table when he came in."

"He came in while you were doing the job?" howled Tasker. "Curse him! I knew something like that would happen . . . you told?"

"No—told nothing!" snapped Philip. "He pulled a gun on me, and held me up. He said: 'I know who you are; you've come from Lord Felboro.'"

"What did you say?" asked Felboro. "I told him he was a liar," said Philip, "but he only laughed. He said: 'I've filed an action against Felboro, which he'll not be able to defend.'"

Felboro smiled.

"Oh, is that so?" he said softly. "I'll have my defence into the court within forty-eight hours of the writ being served on me. Well, what happened then?"

"He recognized me. He said: 'You're Philip from the Frolics Club,'" the man went on, and Felboro started. Here was a complication he had not expected.

"Well?"

"Well," repeated the burglar with a sneer, "what do you think that meant to me? Meant I was going to lose a good job. You don't suppose I was going to stand for that? I hit him with my life-preserver and knocked him out. Look!" He stretched out his hands; to Felboro's horror they were stained with blood.

"You—killed him?" asked Tasker. Philip nodded.

"Yes, he's dead. You've got to help me get out of the country."

Lord Felboro staggered.

"Dead? You killed him?" he asked hollowly.

"It was he or I," said the burglar between his teeth. "He was expecting me. He had told his friends that I was coming, and that you were going to send me. I want some money."

Like a man in a dream, Felboro opened the safe, and, taking out a packet of notes, gave a few to the man.

"What about my ten thousand?"

"You can't have it. You'd better take what you can get."

The man counted the money, grumbling. "Seven hundred," he said in disgust.

"That's enough to get you out of the country. We shall want the rest for ourselves. Now clear."

Philip slunk out of the room, and they heard the door close behind him. The two men, left alone, looked at one another. "I think this is the end," said Felboro. He put the remainder of the notes in his pocket.

"Go home and collect all the money you can. Drive yourself to Harwich and catch the early morning boat for the Continent. I will go by way of Dover-Flushing."

"But they can't bring us into it," faltered Sir Charles, "If Philip gets away—"

"You don't suppose a chap like that can get away? He hasn't the brains to make an escape. Before to-morrow night we shall be under arrest if we stay here. Clear out!"

At seven o'clock the next morning a tall and distinguished-looking man strolled along the Dover quay.

Half-an-hour later the Earl of Felboro, wrapped in a heavy fur overcoat, was watching the cliffs of Dover grow fainter and fainter.

It was on the tenth of the month that Lord Felboro made his dramatic escape from England, and on the twenty-fifth when, minus his moustache, and with his appearance slightly altered, he sat down to breakfast in a little Viennese café and asked for the first English newspaper he had seen since he left England. He turned the pages, seeking some information about the Marble Arch murder. He knew there had been a murder somewhere in the neighbourhood of Marble Arch, because, when he was in Berlin, he heard two Englishmen speaking about it, and moved away lest his face betrayed him.

Now he saw the news—a rather attenuated paragraph headed "The Edgware Road Crime":

Walter Brayde, the man charged with the alleged murder of his wife in the Edgware Road, was committed for trial yesterday.

Walter Brayde—wife? What did it mean? On the seventh—that crime had been committed three days before he left England!

He turned the pages in bewilderment, and then he saw a startling heading which held his eye and left him breathless:

The Saltesh Case

New Earl's Claim Established

The paragraph which followed ran:

Lord Felboro has had eight days to file a defence in the action brought by the claimant to the Saltesh earldom, and as he has failed to contest the action which his lordship is bringing for the recovery of the estate, Lord Saltesh automatically succeeds in his action.

The new Lord Saltesh has had an adventurous career. He arrived in this country from America penniless, and for some time was employed at the Frolics Club, where he was known as Philip. To the suggestion made by our representative that he was the original Earl of Nowhere, whose mysterious appearances and disappearances were so startling, his lordship laughingly replied that the real Earl of Nowhere, so far as he knew, was Lord Felboro, whose sudden disappearance from London has been so much commented upon.

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