

CHAPTER XII

TONIO, coming in a while later flourishing a flimsy plan of the "Carisbrooke Castle," found his employer sitting moodily in front of the fire.

"Everything you want in three weeks' time, but nothing before then," said Tonio.

Buddy looked up. "I want to go to-morrow. I want to start now."

"Impossible," said Tonio.

Buddy exhausted himself in vain oaths. More than ever was departure from England imperative. Three weeks—a lifetime! Anything might happen in three weeks. Tonio regarded him incomprehensibly. What had happened?

"I oughtn't to be allowed to go about loose," groaned Buddy. "I never thought I could make such a fool of myself."

Tonio's shoulders moved in a faint shrug. He had given up trying to understand the new and mysterious Buddy. He spread out the plan on the library table, and awaited Buddy's good pleasure.

Buddy rose, looked at the pencil-marked cabins with lack-lustre eye.

"Find out how long they'll hold the accommodation for us. There must be other places—Brazil, Australia—where one can get to, starting at once. Go round all the steamer offices the first thing in the morning."

Tonio looked at him out of his shrewd bright eyes.

"Tell me, Buddy, since you want to get out of England so quick, have you done anything wrong?"

"Everything I do seems more wrong than what I've done before," cried Buddy. "I'm up to my neck in mess."

And out of the mess he felt he could never extricate himself—not he, Buddy, with his lack of self-control. In one moment of passion, stung by a girl's scorn, he had forgotten all his fear-dictated resolutions. How, after his declaration in his natural voice and manner, could Diana mistake him for the barely tolerated Atherton? If Diana had not seen that he loved and wanted her in the good old human way, she was a fool of a woman. And a fool of a woman was the last thing on earth Diana could possibly be.

Anyhow, he had made it clear that he had done with Muriel. He tried to console his conscience that he had taken the only way out of a miserable and sorry affair. Diana must think of his conduct whatsoever she would.

At the same time, was Diana as outraged as her scornful exit implied? She had listened to him while he held her wrists, and had not wrenched them away in maiden indignation. He had released them unresisting of his own accord. He had plunged into the depths of her eyes, and below incredulous amazement he had not detected anger or hatred.

He went to sleep that night thinking of these things. In his own person of Buddy Drake why shouldn't he, why couldn't he win her? Sooner or later she would fall into the arms of some man, decent or otherwise. It was the way of nature. Why shouldn't he be the man? He was not too disfavoured to look upon. He had within him the elements of righteousness and sweet dealing, both with man and womankind. He

desired her madly. She knew it. To no man, clear of the taint of the satyr, who desires a woman madly, can the woman be absolutely indifferent. She must think of him in some sort of feminine way of her own.

He fell asleep, his head filled with crazily fantastic schemes. He awoke in the morning to disillusion.

At breakfast a new shock awaited him.

Tonio, who had conscientiously constituted himself the perfect secretary, came into the dining-room with the morning's correspondence.

"Here are two letters," he said, "which I don't understand."

They were tradesmen's letters, couched in the most respectful terms. There must, of course, be some mistake, as the enclosed cheques in payment of account had been returned dishonoured.

There were the cheques, two of them, hideously marked:

"No account. Refer to drawer."

Buddy stared at them. There was his ordinarily accepted signature, "Atherton Drake." The rest of the cheque was made out in Tonio's typescript. They were just commonplace payments to butcher and baker. He had turned over the bills to Tonio.

Then suddenly the heading of the cheques stared into his eyes. They were cheques issued, not by his companionable bank in Hanover Square, but by the Lothbury, E.C., branch of the bank in which Atherton had his mysterious account.

The primary solution of the problem was simple. He had thrown the Lothbury cheque-book into his drawer, cheek by jowl with the Hanover Square cheque-book. Tonio, ignorant but zealous secretary, charged with the making out of cheques for household expenses, had used the wrong cheque-book. He, Buddy, most careless of masters, had signed the

cheques without regarding the bank heading. So far it was all simple. But why, when Atherton's last counterfoil showed the clear credit balance of nearly a thousand pounds, should the cheques be returned dishonoured?

There was no question of forged signature. Merely the bold announcement of "No account."

To explain matters to the bewildered Tonio was easy. He had ceased to be customer of the Lothbury bank long ago, and oughtn't to have left the useless cheque-book lying about. A line of apology accompanied by a cheque on the Hanover Square bank would satisfy the tradesmen. Tonio went away happy. But Buddy felt himself in the presence of a mystery; possibly a sinister mystery.

Had Atherton kept his Lothbury bank account under an assumed name? That could be the only solution. But why? Buddy's mind began to move swiftly. The cheque-book and the steel despatch-box were intimately connected. The missing keys? Why should they not be in the custody of the Lothbury bank, together with securities of which the dividends were noted on the counterfoils?

He finished his breakfast, went to the library and examined the Lothbury cheque-book. The last payment had been made only two months ago and the amount had been carefully deducted from the credit balance. The number on the first cheque was next in sequence to that on the last counterfoil. It was inconceivable that the balance should have been withdrawn.

He was about to throw the cheque-book into the drawer when his eyes met the typewritten sheet of unintelligible fractions. It became at once part and parcel of the general mystery. In the corner of the book-case the blackened steel box stood ironically

defiant. He took it up and laid it on the library table. It was closed so tightly that the line between lid and body was scarcely perceptible. Three perpendicular parallel slits formed the keyholes. Behind them ran a band of bright steel. The thing had been specially made to be opened only by diabolically contrived keys. And the keys lay in the strong room of a bank to which he, as Atherton Drake, could have no access.

He took the accursed box into his bedroom where he employed all the toilet instruments which he could find, including a manicure set, in a vain endeavour to force the locks. He broke knives and scissors and twisted buttonhooks. The keyholes seemed to be only camouflaged parts of a solid steel mass. He carried the box back to the library where Tonio, who worked in the back room planned originally as the husband's study, joined him smilingly with a handful of documents for his signature.

"I've lost the keys of this infernal box," he said. "If you can open it I'll really call you a conjurer."

Tonio laughed. It wasn't a conjurer but an expert safe-crook who was needed.

"Do you think I can cable the governor of Sing-Sing to send me one, all expenses paid?" said Buddy.

Tonio thought this very humorous.

"You might try," he said.

Buddy thought he had better first try Bronson.

"Bronson," he said, "I've lost the keys of this box. Do you remember the firm"—he snapped his fingers in vain summons of memory—"who supplied it some years ago?"

"I don't, Sir Atherton. Except for the last few days lying there, I've never set eyes on it before."

He dismissed Bronson, forlorn hope, broken reed—what you will. Whence had Atherton procured this infernal contraption?

Buddy, the last person on earth to give way to attack of nerves, broke down; almost wept before the silly, baffling steel box. At last he damned it in a futile way and taking, as usual, the line of least resistance, set it back on the lowest shelf of the book-case.

The Park Lane flat became a horrible prison. Madness would grip him before he could sail in the "Carisbrooke Castle." There was nothing to do during the leaden and laggard hours. For occupation sake he said one day to Tonio:

"Teach me some of your old conjuring tricks. It's something to do, anyway."

So Tonio, whose secretarial activities were not overstrained, began to initiate him into the mystery of the magician's craft.

"But you have the hands, my dear Buddy," he cried one day, "the flexible conjurer's hands and long fingers. You ought to be able to do anything. It's only practice. Look. This card. I can't do it now for my hands are crippled. But with your wonderful hands I can make you pass it from back to front. Like this. See?" He showed him, manipulating his fingers. "Two hours a day—just these movements—and you soon will be perfect."

That was the beginning of Buddy's conjuring education.

One morning, having an appointment with a tailor in Maddox Street—he had ordered some thin clothes in view of the South African summer—the pale, wintry sun and dry pavements tempted him to walk. He proceeded down Park Lane, turning into Upper Brook Street. As he was passing Claridge's an elderly, beaming ecclesiastic in stringed hat and gaiters met him with outstretched hands.

"My dear Drake! How are you?"

"Just so so," said Buddy, returning the fervid clasp.

The bishop—for bishop it was—laughed genially.

"I've never seen you looking so well. Why weren't you at the meeting last night?"

"What meeting?"

"Why, the Hellenic of course. I came up especially for it. We all expected to find you there."

"I'm not so well as I look," said Buddy, "and unfortunately I'm not allowed to go out at night."

"That's a pity. You would have enjoyed it. Passereau came from Paris to give us his new light on Plotinus—always a baffling fellow. It's more or less your subject—the Neo-Platonists. A most interesting evening."

Buddy sighed. "I'm cut off from so much nowadays."

"We must get Passereau to send you a copy of his paper—it'll be published in the 'Transactions' of the Society—and you must write a critical appreciation. Well, good-bye, my dear Drake."

"Good-bye, my dear fellow," said Buddy.

The genial bishop passed on his way. Buddy crossed Bond Street, thankful to be divided from his unknown acquaintance by the flood of traffic. In spite of the cold of the winter day he raised his hat and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

In these super-civilized thoroughfares of the West End of London lurked untold and horrible dangers. The attack of a wild bishop bludgeoning him with Greek scholarship might be followed by the onslaught of an aristocratic woman in furs, by a deadly politician shaking a skinny finger in his face.

He reached Maddox Street in safety, and after the fitting of his clothes took a taxi home.

"The Union Castle Line on the phone, Sir Atherton. Want to know whether you're taking up the pencilled accommodation on the 'Carisbrooke Castle'."

It was Bronson.

"Why on earth didn't you tell them I'm out? Say I'm out of town. Ask them to write."

Bronson came back with a message. Of course the Company would write, but the matter was urgent. In the meanwhile, if he could get into touch with his master, he was to report that the Company would do their best to reserve the accommodation for so illustrious a person as Sir Atherton Drake—so at least did Buddy gather—but that even the convenience of illustrious persons must be sacrificed sometimes to commercial considerations.

"I'll think it over," said Buddy.

But the more Buddy thought it over, the less possible seemed his escape from the notorious personality of Sir Atherton Drake. Sir Atherton Drake was an ex-Minister—although not a very important one—of the Crown. He had an uncontested position in the academic world. On board ship he must play the part of a reserved lion who permitted only the aristocrats of the social jungle to make a pet of him. In South Africa itself there would be Royal Governors-General, heads of universities, millionaires, all desiring to do honour to the eminent Sir Atherton Drake.

Buddy stood frozen before the prospect for the first time realized. The execution of so gigantic an imposture was not only beyond his wit but also revolting to his moral sense. It was one thing, he repeated to himself, to dispossess an unformed idiot Academy and an already opulent political party of a fortune—that crime sat lightly on his conscience—but it was quite a different thing to accept honour and hospitality, both private and public, under false pretences. As

Sir Atherton Drake he couldn't possibly visit South Africa. By the same process of reasoning all British Dominions were closed to him—Australia, Canada, New Zealand—the Indian Empire.

Where in the world should he betake himself in his Athertonian plumes?

"Tonio," he said, after having instructed the little man to cancel the South African bookings, "I've discovered that this planet is far too small for the comfort of a reasonable man. Let us take tickets to Mars."

Tonio scratched his cropped white head uncomprehendingly.

"What is it that you're afraid of? You have a title. You have a fortune. You have a beautiful country-house. You have this beautiful apartment. You have automobiles, servants, all that one could desire for happiness—and yet you're unhappy."

Buddy, sitting back in an armchair, his hands up to his temples, regarded him haggardly.

"Who's happy in this bloody world? Are you?"

"I am grateful, at least," said Tonio, "for all the mercies that God bestows on me."

Buddy replied with a short laugh:

"You'd better teach me how to get religion, and then we'll both become monks."

"For myself," said Tonio gravely, "I have already thought of it."

Buddy jumped up. "No, old man. No. Whatever one may think of God and religion and that sort of thing—I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world—yet I can't imagine God being pleased with you for scuttling away from the battle of life and skulking in a monastery. Of course, if you feel the spiritual vocation, that's another matter. But out of sheer furk, no!"

Tonio smiled, and his face was lit with a pathetic beauty.

"That I have told myself. I shall fight until I feel the spiritual vocation."

"We'll fight together," said Buddy.

"If we are to do that," said Tonio softly, "why not tell me what's troubling you?"

Buddy turned away. "I can't, old man, not yet. I wish I could. I will some day."

"You are afraid," said Tonio.

"Perhaps."

"Of me?"

"Of you and me. Of things—I can't explain. Of things between us that I should hate to lose. If I lost them I'd be the God-damnedest, lonest man on earth."

Tonio put out his crippled hands in a vague gesture.

"Without you, Buddy, I should be the same. Tell me what you want in your own good time. There is one thing—one last thing to which every man has a right, that is his alone, and that is the key to his own soul. Unless," he added after a pause, "he belongs to my faith. Then he must give it only to a priest in the confessional."

There was a long silence. Buddy walked about the room, threw some coals on the fire.

"When did you learn all this, Tonio?" he asked.

Tonio smiled and lit a cigarette.

"If a professional conjurer doesn't make a study of human nature he will be a very bad conjurer. See here," he said sharply, "why don't you open that—a despatch-box?"

"What?" said Buddy.

"That box." He corrected instinctively the curious Italo-American liaison between harsh consonants which had lingered for a lifetime in his speech.

"You're afraid, Buddy."

"I'm not." He drew himself up indignantly.

"But without a key how am I to open the damned thing?"

"All manufacturers of safes and such things have experts who can open anything. You talked about crooks. That was foolish."

"Well, go and get me an expert," said Buddy.

"He shall be here to-morrow," said Tonio.

"There you are, sir," said the expert the next day, throwing open the mutilated lid of the box.

He retired, followed by Tonio. Buddy was left alone to grapple with his mystery. But the more he grappled with it the less soluble did it become. The contents of the box consisted only of masses of documents, some pinned together, some folded and docketed by means of strange signs, some loose. Some in manuscript, some in typescript. But not a scrap of paper, as he feverishly examined the mass, bore any other symbol than the baffling fractional cipher in which the recent letter was couched. He scanned page after page in the vain hope of obtaining a clue. On obvious letters there was never a printed letter-heading. Addresses and dates and signatures, in the usual places, were in the cipher. They bore no customary beginnings or endings of courtesy; nothing corresponded to "Dear Sir" or "Yours faithfully" from which, perhaps, he might have found something to work upon.

He was not a step nearer the secret of the Lothbury banking account. He was helpless. Anyone could call in an expert to break open a box or safe of which the keys were lost without exciting suspicion. But in his isolation and ignorance he dare not call in an expert to decipher these strange, jealously guarded documents.

When Tonio came into the room, Buddy closed the lid.

"I've found what I wanted," he said casually.

"I'm very glad," said Tonio.

"Let's get on with our conjuring," said Buddy.
"What about sending out for some rabbits and a bowl of gold-fish?"

"All in good time," smiled Tonio.

Two nights after this—whithersoever he might go he must wait for the new suits he had ordered from the Maddox Street tailor—Buddy went out for the walk that had grown habitual. He must take exercise or he would grow heavy and liverish and a curse unto himself. And he must walk fast for a couple of hours—no matter where. If in a definite circuit, so much the better; if straight ahead, through Hammersmith or Putney, or, the other way, along Oxford Street, Holborn, the City, he could always, when tired, find a taxi to take him home. He went alone. In the night thoroughfares of London, with their myriad mysteries of loneliness, a man on foot is his own best companion. It was the only period of his working day when Buddy felt free; when he could be Buddy Drake once more; when he could stand by a coffee-stall and talk, unknown human unit, to other human units equally obscure. A tactfully expended shilling or two could gain him queerly sympathetic human intercourse. His vagrant footsteps had led him to other strange places unfrequented by Sir Atherton Drake. He had strayed into the Hammersmith Palais de Danse and had purchased the fleeting Terpsichorean companionship of a Miss Mullens, an exquisite, fair-haired creature of Robot inaccessibility. It was very cold. He didn't dance the new steps? Oh, he had been living in America? That was a long way off. He vaguely gathered from her perfunctory and precise verbiage that his new steps must have changed *diablement en route*.

He had even found himself hungrily eating fried fish and chips in Shoreditch.

On this particular night he wandered out, about ten o'clock, with no defined notion of direction, and had marched some twenty yards down Park Lane when a touch on his shoulder caused him to start and halt fiercely on the defensive.

"Sir Atherton——"

"Oh, go to hell!" cried Buddy, swinging an arm.

The man confronted him. In the dim light Buddy became aware of a man of some distinction. He wore a silk hat. The loose silk muffler round his neck disclosed the white tie of evening-dress. The sharp, thin face, clean-shaven except for a clipped, grizzled moustache, seemed to be that of one of his own class.

"I'm sorry, my friend, to have startled you, knowing that you are an invalid. But I have no choice."

Buddy noted that he spoke careful English, with a curious foreign accent.

"That's all right," said Buddy. "What do you want?"

"Some talk with you, obviously. I don't wait outside your door, waiting for you to come out, for nothing."

"As you know my door, why the devil didn't you come up and find out whether I could see you?"

"I don't understand——" said the man.

"Neither do I," said Buddy.

"That is surprising. Let us walk a little. It is too cold to stand still."

Buddy mechanically strolled down Park Lane by his side.

"Why haven't you answered my two letters?"

"What letters?"

"The first, the foolish one. The second, in cipher, very serious."

"What was in them?" asked Buddy. "I've been ill, as you seem to know, and I've not been able to worry with my correspondence."

The man slackened his steps and touched Buddy on the arm.

"This is not like you, Atherton. *Quelle mouche vous a piqué?*"

"What?" asked Buddy, not catching the French.

"What fly has bitten you? What is the matter? Payments are overdue. Never before has it happened. I write you two letters which you perfectly understand. Still no answer. You ask me why I should not visit you in your apartment. You stagger me with the question. I learn that you're in Paris. I also learn that you're back in London. You've contracted new and extraordinary habits. For the last few nights you go out regularly about ten o'clock. I wait to-night and I meet you. As you say in English—what's it all about?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," replied Buddy coolly.

"It's up to you, I should think, to tell me."

"I have already told you. The payments are overdue!"

Buddy began to glow in the light of one of his lunatic inspirations.

"What payments, my dear friend?" he asked blandly.

"What payments! You're talking nonsense."

"Or are you talking blackmail?"

Again he halted beneath a street lamp and scanned, as well as he could, the features of his companion. The eyes of the latter flashed angrily.

"That's an imbecile word to use after all these years of honourable association. You must be going mad!"

"No," said Buddy with a little thrill of enjoyment.

Life had been very dull of late. "By no means. I'm talking sanity. Why should I pay you a lot of money? It seems you want a lot. I don't even know how much. What have you done to deserve it?"

The other raised his arms in a foreign shrug.

"Really you are taking leave of your senses!"

"But do tell me why, my dear friend," said Buddy, in his kindest tone.

"It stands to reason. It has always stood to reason," said the flabbergasted man. "Until this moment there has never been any question."

"Of what?" asked Buddy.

"Of what—Good God!"

"Don't throw your arms about like that. There's a policeman coming. He'll tell us to move on, or take us up for drunks. Just be quiet for a minute and explain things. You apologized for startling a sick man. And"—he tapped his forehead—"my memory's going. I ought to apologize. Perhaps you're right. I'm not quite the man I was." He assumed a puzzled, baffled expression. "Give me a friendly lead. Of course I know you, dear old friend. But your name?"

He snapped his fingers. The other snapped his lips.

"Andrea Chrysolos."

Buddy clapped him on the shoulder. "Let's get on." He linked his arm under that of his friend. "Now it all comes back to me. You've been writing to me. The cipher—you mentioned the cipher."

"Naturally, the cipher."

Buddy's heart leaped within him. Here was adventure. Wild adventure. The cipher! Something to set a man's brain afire with lambent clarity. Buddy had the sensation of being not a human being but a perambulating intellect. He was on the thresh-

old of an amazing discovery. Could he, by exercise of mother wit, mystify this Greek, Andrea Chrysolos—his mind registered the name for all time—into revelation of Atherton's mystery? The cipher!

He clung to the man's arm affectionately.

"Let us go somewhere, where we can have a heart to heart talk. Not *chez-moi* for obvious reasons." The hint had been given before by Chrysolos. "Where? I tell you what— Are you known at the Grosvenor Hotel?"

"No," replied the man impatiently.

"Neither am I."

It was true. Tonio had a room there and he had once called for him in his car, but he had walked in and out, an unrecorded impersonality. It could not possibly be a haunt of Atherton's. He hailed a taxi.

"I hate conversing in an upright position," he said as they turned into Piccadilly. "Standing on one's feet one can address multitudes. But gossip with a friend—that's different. Have a cigarette? Besides," he went on, "I assume you want to have a very serious conversation with me. Dear, dear, how long is it since we've met?"

"Four years," replied Chrysolos.

"How time flies," said Buddy. "Who would have thought it!"

Chrysolos, apparently in no mood to toy with philosophical platitudes, made no reply, and they exchanged no further words until the taxi, after its swift course down Grosvenor Place, drew up at the Grosvenor Hotel.

At the far end of the main hall was a broad flight of steps leading to a quiet and comfortable lounge whose windows, discreetly curtained by night, look on the busy platforms of the Brighton branch of the station. Save for a female voyager with a knitted shawl round

her shoulders, writing at the far end of the room, away from the fireplace where a bright fire was burning—there still lingers a type of voyaging English spinster who thinks it's weak or unhygienic or immoral to sit near a fire—the place at that time of night was deserted. Buddy drew two chairs to a table by the mantelpiece.

"Let us be comfortable, at any rate." He rang a bell. A waiter appeared.

"What'll you have?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, come. I'm having a whisky and soda. You must."

The Greek shrugged and conceded shortly.

"A small Evian."

Buddy concluded that the man lacked a sense of joviality.

"Another cigarette."

This was accepted. They settled down to their talk.

"Now," said Buddy, preparing to enjoy himself, as he had done years ago when entrusted with the dangerous task of setting traps for Germans, "let us have it out together. How far had we got in our conversation?"

"We had got nowhere," replied Chrysolos morosely. "And I don't see why we should try to get anywhere. There is no going back or going forward. The position is eternally the same. That you don't appear to realize it is to me a bewildering act of unreason."

Buddy leaned back in his chair and passed a languid hand over his eyes.

"I've been ill, as I've told you. Very ill. I can't remember even the commonest things. You say you've written to me. What did you say?"

"I reminded you of the payments."

"Oh, yes," said Buddy, striving to look at him

in a hollow-eyed manner. "And I suppose you threatened——?"

"Suppose I did, if you like, Sir Atherton Drake," said the other cuttingly. "Haven't I the right to do so? Have I not always acted honourably towards you—as you to me? You say you've lost your memory. That may be fine for you. But, as you say in this country, where do I come in? We were partners. You had the lion's share. That was natural. It was yours by right. But the poor jackal"—he made an angry gesture with his fist—"has his rights too. And he must claim them. It's obvious."

"It is, my dear fellow," said Buddy wearily. "But let us theorize for a while. Let us put a—what you call it?—hypothetical case. Suppose I'm sick of being a lion and have conceived a horrible loathing for jackals. What then?"

The other, possibly the most bewildered man on earth, leaned forward in his chair and almost whispered.

"You couldn't be so mad, Atherton."

"Why?" asked Buddy.

"But, good God Almighty, I've got all your reports. I only have to make a packet of them, with the key to the cipher, and send them anonymously to the Foreign Office or Scotland Yard. They would be read. Naturally, you would be"—he flickered expressive fingers—"done for. I would lose my income, the greater part of it. For, after all," he said with a flourish, "I have enough to keep me from starvation. But there would be no possible question of prosecution for blackmail. How could there be?"

"Quite so. Quite so," said Buddy reflectively, and taking a sip of his drink. "You must forgive me. I've been going through such a bad time. And of

course there was no one to whom I could refer. I have had nobody in my confidence."

"I should hope not!" said Chrysolos.

"Well, that's that," said Buddy. "You see my position. I've been very ill. Despaired of. Really. But, as I said, it's all getting clear now. But there are one or two things that worry me. Supposing I were to die. What would happen to your income?"

The most bewildered man in the world said huskily :

"But, my good Atherton, can you sit here and tell me that you haven't read my last two or three letters?"

"I haven't," said Buddy blankly. "I couldn't."

"Why?"

"Because," said Buddy, putting a despairing hand to his brow, "I have lost—forgotten—the key to the cipher. I've nearly gone out of my mind over it. How could I tell my doctors?" Buddy discomposed his features into haggardness. "It's something so simple, after all."

The other bent forward and tapped his knee, and regarded him with an air of concern.

"I knew—I have my means of knowing that you were a sick man—in danger from your heart. But I never thought you were as ill as that. The cipher. The Paternoster."

The dawn of a smile illuminated Buddy's face. He raised a hand.

"Yes, yes. How does it go on?"

The Greek, humouring him, kindly said :

"*Pater noster qui es in cælis* . . . The letter 'e' either fourth letter of first word or"—he counted on his fingers—"fifth letter of second word . . . et cetera . . . either numerator 4 and denominator 1, or numerator 5 and denominator 2 . . . and so on with its infinite combinations."

Buddy smiled a seraphic smile and covered his eyes with the balls of his thumbs.

"Good God! Of course!" He swept his hands away. "What an unexplored mystery the human brain is. I knew all the time that it wasn't one of those silly ciphers that must have a written key. I knew it depended on something that people carried in their head. During my illness something hammered in my brain. Greek. Greek. Greek. You see the association, don't you? Whereas, of course, it's the Latin Paternoster. Everything's as clear as mud now, my dear fellow."

He rose and Chrysolos rose too.

"Quite sure you won't have a drink?"

"No thank you, Atherton."

"Well, everything will be all right now." Buddy patted him on the shoulder.

They descended the broad stairs together, crossed the hall. Buddy signalled the doorkeeper for a taxi. He wrung the Greek's hand.

"Good-bye, my dear friend. I've had a most delightful evening. I haven't the faintest idea who you are"—he held his hand in a tight grip—"or who you think I am."

The man gasped. "Atherton Drake."

"Never heard of him," said Buddy cheerfully, throwing himself up in all his brawn and newly acquired flesh, and assuming his most un-Athertonian grin. "Atherton who? My name's Bendyke, Cyrus Bendyke, an American actor." He gave a touch of American accent. "It's been perfectly fine meeting you, but I don't know what the hell you've been talking about."

Chrysolos, still in Buddy's grip, continued to gasp.

"You're not Atherton Drake? No, you're not." He looked at him open-mouthed, and eyes staring.

"Of course you're not. You're his double." He wrenched his hand away. "But how come you to live in Park Lane Mansions?"

"I don't live there," said Buddy. "Go there sometimes to see a sister of mine who has married an Englishman."

The sallow, aristocratic Chrysolos, his overcoat thrown back, and showing white waistcoat and white tie of evening dress, stood quivering with anger.

• "You've made a fool of me, sir."

"Why not?" smiled Buddy. "You put yourself into my hands, and begged me to play with you."

The doorkeeper touched his cap.

"Taxi, sir."

Buddy accompanied the outraged man a step or two.

"Bendyke's my name. Cyrus Bendyke."

The Greek made a furious gesture and disappeared through the swing doors.

Buddy returned to the entresol lounge and ordered another whisky and soda.

"Now I've got to do some thinking," he said.

