

Le Queux William

# The Lady in the Car



William Le Queux  
**The Lady in the Car**

«Public Domain»

**Le Queux W.**

The Lady in the Car / W. Le Queux — «Public Domain»,

## Содержание

Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	14
Chapter Three	22
Chapter Four	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

# Le Queux William

## The Lady in the Car

### Preface

### An Apology

I hereby tender an apology to the reader for being compelled, in these curious chronicles of an adventurous motorist and his actions towards certain of his female acquaintances, to omit real names, and to substitute assumed ones. With the law of libel looming darkly, the reason is obvious.

Since the days when, as lads, we played cricket together at Cheltenham “the Prince,” always a sportsman and always generous to the poor, has ever been my friend. In the course of my own wandering life of the past dozen years or so, I have come across him in all sorts of unexpected places up and down Europe, and more especially in those countries beyond the Danube which we term the Balkans.

For certain of his actions, and for the ingenuity of his somewhat questionable friends, I make no apology. While the game of “mug-hunting” remains so easy and so profitable, there will be always both hunters and hunted. As my friend’s escapades were related to me, so have I set them down in the following pages, in the belief that my readers may perhaps care to make more intimate acquaintance with the clever, fearless, and altogether remarkable man whose exploits have already, from time to time, been referred to in guarded and mysterious terms by the daily press.

William Le Queux.

## Chapter One

### His Highness's Love Affair

The Prince broke open a big box of choice “Petroffs,” selected one, lit it slowly, and walked pensively to the window.

He was in a good mood that morning, for he had just got rid of a troublesome visitor.

The big *salon* was elegantly furnished with long mirrors, gilt chairs covered with sky-blue silk upholstery, a piano, and a pretty writing-table set close to the long window, which led out to a balcony shaded by a red-and-white sun-blind – the *salon* of the best suite in the Majestic, that huge hotel facing the sea in King's Road, Brighton.

He was a tall, well-set-up man of about thirty-three; dark-haired, good-looking, easy-going, and refined, who, for the exception of the slightest trace of foreign accent in his speech, might easily have been mistaken for an Englishman. In his well-cut dark brown flannels and brown shoes he went to the balcony, and, leaning over, gazed down upon the sun-lit promenade, full of life and movement below.

His arrival a few days before had caused quite a flutter in the big hotel. He had not noticed it, of course, being too used to it. He travelled a great deal – indeed, he was always travelling nowadays – and had learned to treat the constant endeavours of unknown persons to scrape acquaintance with him with the utter disregard they deserved.

Not often did the Majestic, so freely patronised by the stockbroker and the newly-rich, hold as guest any person equalling the Prince in social distinction, yet at the same time so modest and retiring. The blatant persons overcrowding the hotel that August Sunday, those pompous, red-faced men in summer clothes and white boots, and those over-dressed women in cream silk blouses and golden chatelaines, mostly denizens of Kensington or Regent's Park, had been surprised when an hour ago he had walked along the hall and gone outside to speak with his chauffeur. He was so very good-looking, such a sportsman, and so very English they whispered. And half of those City men's wives were instantly dying for an opportunity of speaking with him, so that they could return to their suburban friends and tell of their acquaintance with the cousin of his Imperial Majesty the Kaiser.

But Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein was thinking of other things. He had no use for that over-fed Sunday crowd, with their slang chatter, their motor-cars and their gossip of “bithneth,” through which he had just passed. He drew half a dozen times at his yellow Russian cigarette, tossed it away, and lit another.

He was thinking of his visitor who had just left, and – well, there remained a nasty taste in his mouth. The man had told him something – something that was not exactly pleasant. Anyhow, he had got rid of him. So Prince Albert Ernst Karl Wilhelm, head of the great house of Hesse-Holstein, grand-cross of the Orders of the Black Eagle, Saint Sava and the Elephant, and Commander of St. Hubert and of the Crown of Italy, returned again to the balcony, smoked on, and watched.

In the meantime, in the big hall below, sat a well-dressed elderly lady with her daughter, a pretty, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of twenty, a dainty figure in white, who wore a jade bangle upon her left wrist. They were Americans on a tour with “poppa” through Europe. Mr Robert K. Jesup, of Goldfields, Nevada, had gone to pay a pilgrimage to Stratford-on-Avon, while his wife and daughter were awaiting him in Brighton.

With the inquisitiveness of the American girl Mary Jesup had obtained the “Almanach de Gotha” from the reading-room, and both mother and daughter were, with difficulty, translating into English the following notice of the Prince's family which they found within the little red-covered book:

“Evangéliques – Souche: Widukind III, comte de Schwalenberg (principauté de Holstein), 1116-1137; bailli à Arolsen et acquisition du château de Hesse vers, 1150; Comte du Saint Empire

de Hesse, 1349, dignité confirme, 22 juin, 1548; bailli de Wildungen, 1475; acquisition d'Eisenberg (château fort, aujourd'hui en ruines, situé sur la montagne du même nom) vers, 1485; acquisition par héritage du comté de Pymont, 1631; coll. du titre de 'Hoch et Wohlgeboren,' Vienne, 25 févr., 1627; prétention à l'héritage du comté de Rappolstein (Ribeaupierre Haute-Alsace) et des seigneuries de Hohenack et de Geroldseck (ibidem) par suite du mariage (2 juill, 1658) du cte Chrétien-Louis, né 29 juill, 1635, + 12 déc. 1706, avec Elisabeth de Rappolstein, née 7 Mars, 1644, + 6 dec. 1676, après la mort de son oncle Jean-Jacques dernier comte de Rappolstein, 28 juill, 1673; les lignes ci-dessus descendent de deux fils (frères consanguins) du susdit Chrétien-Louis comte de Hesse-Eisenberg, de Pymont et Rappolstein, etc. – V. L'édition de 1832 (Page 84).”

“There, mother!” exclaimed the pretty girl. “Why, they were an ancient family even before America was discovered! Isn't he real nice? Say! I only wish we knew him.”

“Ah, my dear,” replied the elder woman with a sigh. “Those kind of people never know us. He's a royalty.”

“But he looks such a nice man. What a lovely car he's got – real fine! I've been out to see it. How I wish he'd take us for a ride.”

“You'd better ask him, my dear,” laughed her mother.

“Guess I shouldn't be backward. I believe he would in a moment, if I asked him very nicely,” she exclaimed, laughing in chorus. Truth to tell, she had admired him when she had first encountered him two days ago. She had been seated in one of those wicker chairs outside the door in King's Road, when he had come out and taken the chair next to hers, awaiting his car – a big sixty “Mercédès” painted cream, with the princely arms and crown upon its panels.

He was talking in English to his man, who had carried out his motor-coat. He was a prince – one of the wealthiest of all the German princes, a keen automobilist, a sportsman who had hunted big game in German East Africa, a landlord who owned a principality with half a dozen mediaeval castles and some of the finest estates in the German Empire, and one of the Kaiser's most intimate relatives. And yet he was travelling with only his man and his motor-car.

Though Mary Jesup was heiress to the two millions sterling which her father had made during the past three years – as half the people in the hotel knew – yet she was aware that even her father's wealth could not purchase for her the title of Princess of Hesse-Holstein. She was a very charming girl, bright, athletic and go-ahead – a typical American girl of to-day – and as she strolled out along the pier with her mother, her thoughts constantly reverted to the young man in brown who had given her more than one glance when he had passed.

Meanwhile, there had entered to the Prince his faithful valet Charles, a tall, thin, clean-shaven Englishman, some four years his senior.

“Well?” asked his Highness sharply casting himself into an easy-chair, and taking another “Petroff.”

“Got rid of him – eh?”

“Yes – but it was difficult. I gave him a couple of sovereigns, and made an appointment to meet him in the bar of the Cecil, in London, next Thursday at four.”

“Good. That gives us time,” remarked the Prince with a sigh of relief. “And about the girl? What have you found out?”

“She and her mother dined in the *table-d'hôte* room last night, and took coffee afterwards in the Palm Court. The father is the man who owns the gold-mines in Nevada – worth ten million dollars. Last year he gave half a million dollars to charity, and bought the Bourbon pearls for his wife. Gave eighty thousand pounds for them. She's got them here, a long string twice round her neck and reaches to her waist. She's wearing them to-day, and everybody, of course, thinks they're false.”

“How foolish these American women are! Fancy wearing pearls of that price in the open street! Why, she might easily be robbed,” his master remarked.

“But who’d believe they’re genuine? They’re too big to take a thief’s fancy,” replied the faithful Charles. “The Jesups seem fond of jewellery. Miss Mary has a lovely diamond necklet – ”

“And wore it last night, I suppose?”

“Of course. They are newly-rich people, and crowd it all on. Yet, what does it matter? Men like Jesup can easily buy more if they lose it. Why, to have her jewels stolen is only a big advertisement for the American woman. Haven’t you seen cases in the paper – mostly at Newport they seem to occur.”

“The girl is pretty – distinctly pretty, Charles,” remarked the Prince slowly, with a philosophic air.

“Yes, your Highness. And she’d esteem it a great honour if you spoke to her, I’m sure.”

Prince Albert pursed his lips.

“I think not. These American girls have a good deal of spirit. She’d most probably snub me.”

“I think not. I passed through the hall five minutes ago, and she was looking you up in the ‘Almanach de Gotha.’”

His Highness started.

“Was she?” he cried with quick interest. “Then she evidently knows all about me by this time! I wonder – ” and he paused without concluding his sentence.

Charles saw that his master was thinking deeply, so he busied himself by putting some papers in order.

“She’s uncommonly pretty,” his Highness declared presently. “But dare I speak to her, Charles? You know what these Americans are.”

“By all means speak to her. The mother and daughter would be company for you for a few days. You could invite them to go motoring, and they’d no doubt accept,” the man suggested.

“I don’t want the same experience that we had in Vichy, you know.”

“Oh, never fear. These people are quite possible. Their wealth hasn’t spoilt them – as far as I can hear.”

“Very well, Charles.” The Prince laughed, tossing his cigarette-end into the grate, and rising. “I’ll make some excuse to speak with them.”

And Charles, on his part, entertained shrewd suspicions that his master, confirmed bachelor that he was, had, at last, been attracted by a girl’s fresh, fair beauty, and that girl an American.

Time hung heavily upon the Prince’s hands. That afternoon he ran over in his car to Worthing, where he dined at Warne’s, and the evening he spent in lonely state in a box at the Brighton Alhambra. Truth to tell, he found himself thinking always of the sweet-faced, rather saucy American girl, whose waist was so neat, whose tiny shoes were so pointed, and whose fair hair was always drawn straight back from her intelligent brow.

Yes. He felt he must know her. The morrow came, and with it an opportunity occurred to speak with her mother.

They were sitting, as it is usual to sit, at the door of the hotel, when a mishap to a dog-cart driven by a well-known actress gave him the desired opportunity, and ten minutes later he had the satisfaction of bowing before Mary Jesup herself.

He strolled with them on to the Pier, chatting so very affably that both mother and daughter could hardly believe that he was the cousin of an Emperor. Then, at his request to be allowed to join them at their table at luncheon, they had their midday meal together.

The girl in white was altogether charming, and so unlike the milk-and-water misses of Germany, or the shy, dark-eyed minxes of France or Italy, so many of whom had designed to become Princess of Hesse-Holstein. Her frank open manner, her slight American twang, and her Americanisms he found all delightful. Mrs Jesup, too, was a sensible woman, although this being the first occasion that either mother or daughter had even met a prince, they used “Your Highness” a trifle too frequently.

Nevertheless, he found this companionship of both women most charming.

“What a splendid motor-car you have!” Mary remarked when, after luncheon, they were taking their coffee in the Palm Court at the back of the hotel.

“I’m very fond of motoring, Miss Jesup. Are you?” was his Highness’s reply.

“I love it. Poppa’s got a car. We brought it over with us and ran around France in it. We left it in Paris till we get back to the Continent in the fall. Then we do Italy,” she said.

“Perhaps you would like to have a run with me and your mother to-morrow,” the Prince suggested. “It’s quite pretty about the neighbourhood.”

“I’m sure you’re very kind, Prince,” responded the elder woman. “We should be charmed. And further, I guess my husband’ll be most delighted to meet you when he gets down here. He’s been in Germany a lot.”

“I shall be very pleased to meet Mr Jesup,” the young patrician responded. “Till he comes, there’s no reason why we should not have a few runs – that is, if you’re agreeable.”

“Oh! it’ll be real lovely!” declared Mary, her pretty face brightening in anticipation of the pleasure of motoring with the man she so admired.

“Then what about running over to Eastbourne to tea to-day?” he suggested.

Mother and daughter exchanged glances. “Well,” replied Mrs Jesup, “we don’t wish to put you out in the least, Prince. I’m sure – ”

“Good! You’ll both come. I’ll order the car for three o’clock.”

The Prince ascended the stairs much gratified. He had made a very creditable commencement. The hundred or so of other girls of various nations who had been presented to him with matrimonial intent could not compare with her, either for beauty, for charm, or for intelligence.

It was a pity, he reflected, that she was not of royal, or even noble birth.

Charles helped him on with a light motor-coat, and, as he did so, asked:

“If the Parson calls, what am I to say?”

“Say what you like, only send him back to London. Tell him he is better off in Bayswater than in Brighton. He’ll understand.”

“He may want some money. He wrote to you yesterday, remember.”

“Then give him fifty pounds, and tell him that when I want to see him I’ll wire. I want to be alone just now, Charles,” he added a trifle impatiently. “You’ve got the key of my despatch-box, eh?”

“Yes, your Highness.”

Below, he found the big cream-coloured car in waiting. Some of the guests were admiring it, for it had an extra long wheelbase and a big touring body and hood – a car that was the last word in all that was comfort in automobilism.

The English chauffeur, Garrett, in drab livery faced with scarlet, and with the princely cipher and crown upon his buttons, raised his hat on the appearance of his master. And again when a moment later the two ladies, in smart motor-coats, white caps, and champagne-coloured veils, emerged and entered the car, being covered carefully by the fine otter-skin rug.

The bystanders at the door of the hotel regarded mother and daughter with envy, especially when the Prince got in at the girl’s side, and, with a light laugh, gave the order to start.

A few moments later they were gliding along the King’s Road eastward, in the direction of Lewes and Eastbourne.

“You motor a great deal, I suppose?” she asked him, as they turned the corner by the Aquarium.

“A good deal. It helps to pass the time away, you know,” he laughed. “When I have no guests I usually drive myself. Quite recently I’ve been making a tour up in Scotland.”

“We’re going up there this autumn. To the Trossachs. They say they’re fine! And we’re going to see Scott’s country, and Edinburgh. I’m dying to see Melrose Abbey. It must be lovely from the pictures.”

“You ought to get your father to have his car over,” the Prince suggested. “It’s a magnificent run up north from London.”

The millionaire's wife was carefully examining the Prince with covert glances. His Highness was unaware that the maternal gaze was so searching, otherwise he would probably have acted somewhat differently.

A splendid run brought them to Lewes, the old-world Sussex capital. There, with a long blast of the electric siren, they shot down the hill and out again upon the Eastbourne Road, never pulling up until they were in the small garden before the Queen's.

Mary Jesup stepped out, full of girlish enthusiasm. Her only regret was that the people idling in the hall of the hotel could not be told that their companion was a real live Prince.

They took tea under an awning overlooking the sea, and his Highness was particularly gracious towards Mrs Jesup, until both mother and daughter were filled with delight at his pleasant companionship. He treated both women as equals; his manner, as they afterwards put it, being devoid of any side, and yet he was every inch a prince.

That run was the first of many they had together.

Robert K. Jesup had been suddenly summoned by cable to Paris on business connected with his mining interests, therefore his wife and daughter remained in Brighton. And on account of their presence the Prince lingered there through another fortnight. Mostly he spent his days walking or motoring with Mrs Jesup and her daughter, and sometimes – on very rare occasions – he contrived to walk with Mary alone.

One morning, when he had been with her along the pier listening to the band, he returned to luncheon to find in his own room a rather tall, clean-shaven, middle-aged clergyman, whose round face and ruddy complexion gave him rather the air of a *bon vivant*.

Sight of his unexpected visitor caused the Prince to hold his breath for a second. It was the Parson.

“Sorry I was out,” his Highness exclaimed. “Charles told you where I was, I suppose?”

“Yes, Prince,” replied the cleric. “I helped myself to a whisky and soda. Hope you won't mind. It was a nice morning in town, so I thought I'd run down to see you.”

“You want another fifty, I suppose – eh?” asked his Highness sharply. “Some other work of charity – eh?”

“My dear Prince, you've guessed it at once. You are, indeed, very good.”

His Highness rang the bell, and when the valet appeared, gave him orders to go and get fifty pounds, which he handed to the clergyman.

Then the pair had luncheon brought up to the room, and as they sat together their conversation was mostly about mutual friends. For a cleric the Reverend Thomas Clayton was an extremely easy-going man, a thorough sportsman of a type now alas! dying out in England.

It was plain to see that they were old friends, and plainer still when, on parting a couple of hours later, the Prince said:

“When I leave here, old fellow, you'll join me for a little, won't you? Don't worry me any more at present for your Confounded – er charities – will you? Fresh air for the children, and whisky for yourself – eh? By Jove, if I hadn't been a Prince, I'd have liked to have been a parson! Good-bye, old fellow.” And the rubicund cleric shook his friend's hand heartily and went down the broad staircase.

The instant his visitor had gone he called Charles and asked excitedly:

“Did any one know the Parson came to see me?”

“No, your Highness. I fortunately met him in King's Road, and brought him up here. He never inquired at the office.”

“He's a fool! He could easily have written,” cried the Prince eagerly. “Where are those women, I wonder?” he asked, indicating Mrs Jesup and her daughter.

“I told them you would be engaged all the afternoon.”

“Good. I shan't go out again to-day, Charles. I want to think. Go to them with my compliments, and say that if they would like to use the car for a run this afternoon they are very welcome. You

know what to say. And – and see that a bouquet of roses is sent up to the young lady's room before she goes to dress. Put one of my cards on it.”

“Yes, your Highness,” replied the valet, and turning, left his master to himself.

The visit of the Reverend Thomas Clayton had, in some way, perturbed and annoyed him. And yet their meeting had been fraught by a marked cordiality.

Presently he flung himself into a big armchair, and lighting one of his choice “Petroffs” which he specially imported, sat ruminating.

“Ah! If I were not a Prince!” he exclaimed aloud to himself. “I could do it – do it quite easily. But it's my confounded social position that prevents so much. And yet – yet I must tell her. It's imperative. I must contrive somehow or other to evade that steely maternal eye. I wonder if the mother has any suspicion – whether – ?”

But he replaced his cigarette between his lips without completing the expression of his doubts.

As the sunlight began to mellow, he still sat alone, thinking deeply. Then he moved to go and dress, having resolved to dine in the public restaurant with his American friends. Just then Charles opened the door, ushering in a rather pale-faced, clean-shaven man in dark grey tweeds. He entered with a jaunty air and was somewhat arrogant of manner, as he strode across the room.

The Prince's greeting was greatly the reverse of cordial.

“What brings you here, Max?” he inquired sharply. “Didn't I telegraph to you only this morning?”

“Yes. But I wanted a breath of sea-air, so came down. I want to know if you're going to keep the appointment next Monday – or not.”

“I can't tell yet.”

“Hylda is anxious to know. You promised her, remember.”

“I know. But apologise, and say that – well, I have some private business here. You know what to say, Max. And I may want you down here in a hurry. Come at once if I wire.”

The man looked him straight in the face for a few moments.

“Oh!” he ejaculated, and then without being invited, crossed and took a cigarette.

“Charles,” said the visitor to the valet who had remained in the room, “give me a drink. Let me wish success to matrimony.” And with a knowing laugh he tossed off the whisky and soda handed to him. For half an hour he remained chatting confidentially with the Prince, then he left, saying that he should dine alone at the Old Ship, and return to London at ten.

When Max Mason had gone, Prince Albert heaved a long sigh, and passed into the adjoining room to dress.

That night proved a momentous one in his Highness's life, for after dinner Mrs Jesup complained of a bad headache, and retiring at once to her room, left the young people together. What more natural, therefore, than that his Highness should invite Mary to put on her wrap and go for a stroll along the promenade in the moonlight. She accepted the invitation eagerly, and went up to her mother's room.

“I'm going for a walk with him, mother,” she cried excitedly as she burst into the room where Mrs Jesup, with all traces of headache gone, was lazily reading a novel.

“That's real good. Put on something thick, child, for its chilly,” was the maternal reply. “And, remember, you don't go flirting with Princes very often.”

“No, mother, but just leave him to me. I've been thinking over what you say, and I mean to be Princess of Hesse-Holstein before the year's out. Or else – ”

“Or else there'll be trouble – eh?” laughed her mother.

But the girl had disappeared to join the man who loved her, and who was waiting below.

In the bright August moonlight they strolled together as far as Hove, where they sat upon a seat outside the Lawns. The evening was perfect, and there were many passers-by, mostly couples more or less amatory.

Never had a girl so attracted him as had Mary that calm and glorious night. Never had he looked into a woman's eyes and seen there love reflected as in hers. They rose and strolled back again, back to the pier which they traversed to its head. There they found a seat unoccupied, and rested upon it.

And there, taking her little hand tenderly in his, he blurted forth, in the blundering words of a blundering man, the story of his affection.

She heard him in silence to the end.

"I – I think, Prince, you have not fully considered what all this means. What – "

"It means, Mary, that I love you – love you deeply and devotedly as no other man has ever loved a woman! I am not given to ecstasies over affection, for I long ago thought every spark of it was dead within my heart. I repeat, however, that I love you." And ere she could prevent him, he had raised her hand and pressed it to his lips.

She tried to withdraw it, but he held it firmly. The moon shone full upon her sweet face, and he noticed how pale and beautiful she looked. She gave him one glance, and in that instant he saw the light of unshed tears. But she was silent, and her silence puzzled him.

"Ah!" he sighed despondently. "Am I correct, then, in suspecting that you already have a lover?"

"A lover? Whom do you mean?"

"That tall, fair-haired, mysterious man who, during the past week, has been so interested in your movements. Have you not noticed him? He's staying at the hotel. I've seen him twenty times at least, and it is only too apparent that he admires you."

"I've never even seen him," she exclaimed in surprise. "You must point him out to me. I don't like mysterious men."

"I'm not mysterious, am I?" asked the Prince, laughing, and again raising her hand to his lips tenderly. "Will you not answer my question? Do you think you can love me sufficiently – sufficiently to become my wife?"

"But – but all this is so sudden, Prince. I – I – "

"Can you love me?" he interrupted.

For answer she bent her head. Next moment his lips met hers in a hot passionate caress. And thus did their hearts beat in unison.

Before they rose from the seat Mary Jesup had promised to become Princess of Hesse-Holstein.

Next morning, the happy girl told her mother the gratifying news, and when Mrs Jesup entered the Prince's private *salon* his Highness asked her, at least for the present, to keep their engagement secret.

That day the Prince was occupied by a quantity of correspondence, but the future Princess, after a tender kiss upon her white brow, went out in the car with her mother as far as Bognor. Two hours later the Prince sent a telegram to the Rev. Thomas Clayton, despatched Charles post-haste to London by the Pullman express, and then went out for a stroll along King's Road.

He was one of the happiest men in all the world.

Not until dinner did he again meet Mrs Jesup and her daughter. After describing what an excellent run they had had, the millionaire's wife said:

"Oh, Mary has been telling me something about a mysterious fair-haired man whom you say has been watching her."

"Yes," replied his Highness. "He's been hanging about for some days. I fancy he's no good – one of those fellows who live in hotels on the look-out for pigeons."

"What we call in America a crook – eh?"

"Exactly. At least that's my opinion," he declared in confidence.

Mrs Jesup and her daughter appeared both very uneasy, a circumstance which the Prince did not fail to notice. They went up to his *salon* where they had coffee, and then retired early.

Half an hour later, while his Highness was lazily enjoying one of his brown "Petroffs," the millionaire's wife, with blanched face, burst into the room crying:

“Prince! Oh, Prince! The whole of my jewels and Mary’s have been stolen! Both cases have been broken open and the contents gone! My pearls too! What shall we do?” His Highness started to his feet astounded. “Do? Why find that fair-haired man!” he replied. “I’ll go at once to the manager.” He sped downstairs, and all was quickly in confusion. The manager recollected the man, who had given the name of Mason, and who had left suddenly on the previous morning. The police were telephoned for, and over the wires to London news of the great jewel robbery was flashed to New Scotland Yard.

There was little sleep for either of the trio that night. Examination showed that whoever the thief was, he had either been in possession of the keys of the ladies’ trunks, wherein were the jewel-cases, or had obtained impressions of them, for after the jewels had been abstracted the trunks had been relocked.

The Prince was very active, while the two ladies and their maid were in utter despair. Their only consolation was that, though Mary had lost her diamonds, she had gained a husband.

About noon on the following day, while his Highness was reading the paper as he lolled lazily in the depths of the big armchair, a tap came at the door and a waiter ushered in a thin, spare, grey-faced, grey-bearded man.

The Prince sprang to his feet as though he had received an electric shock.

The two men faced each other, both utterly dumbfounded.

“Wal!” ejaculated the visitor at last, when he found tongue. “If this don’t beat hog-stickin’! Say, young Tentoes, do you know I’m Robert K. Jesup?”

“You – Jesup! My dear Uncle Jim!” gasped the other. “What does this mean?”

“Yes. Things in New York over that little poker job are a bit hot just now, so Lil and the old Lady are working the matrimonial trick this side – a spoony jay, secret engagement, and blackmail. Worked it in Paris two years ago. Great success! Done neatly, it’s real good. I thought they’d got hold of a real live prince this time – and rushed right here to find it’s only you! They ought really to be more careful!”

“And I tell you, uncle, I too have been completely deceived. I thought I’d got a soft thing – those Bourbon pearls, you know? They left their keys about, I got casts, and when they were out bagged the boodle.”

“Wal, my boy, you’d better cough ’em up right away,” urged the old American criminal, whose name was Ford, and who was known to his associates as “Uncle Jim.”

“I suppose the Parson’s in it, as usual – eh? Say! the whole lot of sparklers aren’t worth fifty dollars, but the old woman and the girl look well in ’em. My! ain’t we all been taken in finely! Order me a cocktail to take the taste away. Guess Lil’ll want to twist your rubber-neck when she sees you, so you’d better get into that famous car of yours and make yourself scarce, young man!”

The *Sussex Daily News* next morning contained the following announcement:

“His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein has left Brighton for the Continent.”

## Chapter Two

### The Prince and the Parson

His Royal Highness descended from the big cream-coloured “Mercédès” in the Place Royale, drew off his gloves, and entered the quiet, eminently aristocratic Hôtel de l’Europe.

All Brussels knew that Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein was staying there. Hence, as the car pulled up, and the young man in long dust-coat and motor-goggles rose from the wheel and gave the car over to the smart chauffeur Garrett in the grey uniform with crimson facings, a small crowd of gaping idlers assembled to watch his entrance to the hotel. In the hall a few British tourists in tweeds or walking-skirts stared at him, as though a real live prince was of different clay, while on ascending the main staircase to his private suite, two waiters bowed themselves almost in two.

In his sitting-room his middle-aged English man-servant was arranging his newspapers, and closing the door sharply behind him he said: “Charles! That girl is quite a sweet little thing. I’ve seen her again!”

“And your Highness has fallen in love with her?” sniffed the man.

“Well, I might, Charles. One never knows.” And he took a “Petroff” from the big silver box, and lit it with care. “I am very lonely, you know.”

Charles’s lips relaxed into a smile, but he made no remark. He was well aware how confirmed was his master’s bachelordom. He often admired pretty girls, just as much as they adored him – because he was a prince – but his admiration was tinged with the acidity of sarcasm.

When Charles had gone, his Highness flung off his motor-coat and threw himself into a big chair to think. With a smart rat-a-plan, an infantry regiment of *les braves Belges* was crossing the Place to relieve the guard at the Palace. He rose and gazed across the square:

“Ah!” he laughed to himself, “my dear uncle, the Red Rubber King, is closely guarded, it seems! I suppose I ought to call upon him. He’s at home, judging from the royal standard. Whew! What a bore it is to have been born a prince! If I’d been a policeman or a pork-butcher I daresay I’d have had a much better time. The world never guesses how badly we fellows are handicapped. Men like myself cannot cross the road without some scoundrelly journalist working up a ‘royal scandal’ or a political complication.”

Then his thoughts ran off into another direction – the direction in which they had constantly flowed during the past week – towards a certain very charming, sweet-faced girl, scarcely out of her teens, who was staying with her father and mother at the Grand Hotel, down on the boulevard.

The Northovers were English – decidedly English. They were of that insular type who, in a Continental hotel, demand bacon and eggs for breakfast, denounce every dish as a “foreign mess,” and sigh for the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding of middle-class suburbia. James Northover, Charles had discovered to be a very estimable and trusted person, manager of the Stamford branch of the London and North Western Bank, who was now tasting the delights of Continental travel by three weeks’ vacation in Belgium. His wife was somewhat obese and rather strong-minded, while little Nellie was decidedly pretty, her light brown hair dressed low and secured by a big black velvet bow, a pair of grey, rather mischievous eyes, sweetly dimpled cheeks, and a perfect complexion. Not yet nineteen, she had only left the High School a year before, and was now being afforded an opportunity of inflicting her school-girl French upon all and sundry with whom she came into contact.

And it was French – French with those pronounced “ong” and “onny” endings for which the tourist-agents are so terribly responsible.

But with all her linguistical shortcomings little Nelly Northover, the slim-waisted school-miss with the tiny wisp of unruly hair straying across her brow, and the rather smart and intelligent chatter, had attracted him. Indeed, he could not get the thought of her out of his head.

They had met at a little inn at the village of Anseremme, on the Meuse, close to Dinant – that paradise of the cheap “hotel-included” tourist. Something had gone wrong with the clutch of his car, and he had been held up there for two days while an engineer had come out from Brussels to repair the damage. Being the only other guest in the place beside the eminently respectable bank manager and his wife and daughter, he lost no time in ingratiating himself with them, and more especially with the last-named.

Though he spoke English perfectly and with but the very slightest accent, he had given his name at the inn as Herr Birkenfeld, for was not that one of his names? He was Count of Birkenfeld, and seigneur of a dozen other places, in addition to being Prince of the royal house of Hesse-Holstein. The bank manager and his wife, of course, believed him to be a young German gentleman of means until, on the morning of the day of his departure, Charles, in greatest confidence, revealed to them who his master really was.

The English trio were utterly staggered. To Nellie, there was an element of romance at meeting a real prince in those rural solitudes of river and forest. As she declared to her mother, he was so nice and so unassuming. Just, indeed, like any ordinary man.

And in her young mind she compared Albert Prince of Hesse-Holstein with the provincial young gentlemen whom she had met last season at the popular county function, the Stamford Ball.

As constantly Nellie Northover’s thoughts reverted to the affable prince, so did his Highness, on his part, sit hour upon hour smoking his pet Russian cigarettes in quick succession, pondering and wondering.

His position was one of terrible weariness. Ah! how often he wished that he had not been born a prince. As an ordinary mortal he might have dared to aspire to the hand of the sweet young English miss. But as Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein, such a marriage would be denounced by press and public as a *misalliance*.

He liked James Northover. There was something of the John Bull about him which he admired. A keen, hard-headed business man, tall and bald, who spoke with a Nottingham brogue, and who had been over thirty years in the service of the bank, he was a highly trusted servant of his directors. In allowing overdrafts he seldom made mistakes, while his courtesy had brought the bank a considerably increased business.

The Prince knew all that. A couple of days after meeting Nellie in Anseremme he had written to a certain Reverend Thomas Clayton, who lived in Bayswater, and had only that morning received a long letter bearing the Stamford postmark.

It was on account of this letter that he went out after luncheon in the car along the Rue Royale, and down the Boulevard Botanique, to the Grand Hotel on the Boulevard d’Anspach.

He found Nellie alone in the big *salon*, reading an English paper. On seeing him the girl flushed slightly and jumped to her feet, surprised that he should call unexpectedly.

“Miss Northover!” he exclaimed, raising his motor-cap, “I’ve called to take you all for a little run this afternoon – if you can come. I have the car outside.”

“I’m sure it’s awfully kind of you, Prince,” the girl replied with some confusion. “I – well, I don’t know what to say. Father and mother are out.”

“Ah!” he laughed; “and of course you cannot come with me alone. It is against your English ideas of *les convenances*– eh?”

She laughed in chorus, afterwards saying:

“I expect them back in half an hour.”

“Oh, then, I’ll wait,” he exclaimed, and taking off his motor-coat, he seated himself in a chair and began to chat with her, asking what sights of Brussels she had seen, at the same time being filled with admiration at her fresh sweetness and *chic*. They were alone in the room, and he found an indescribable charm in her almost childlike face and girlish chatter. She was so unlike the artificial women of cosmopolitan society who were his friends.

Yes. He was deeply in love with her, and by her manner towards him he could not fail to notice that his affection was reciprocated.

Presently her parents appeared. They had noticed the big cream-coloured car with the chauffeur standing outside, and at once a flutter had run through both their hearts, knowing that the august visitor had arrived to call upon them.

Northover was full of apologies, but the Prince cut them short, and within a quarter of an hour they were all in the car and on the road to that goal of every British tourist, the battlefield of Waterloo. The autumn afternoon was perfect. The leaves had scarcely begun to turn, and the sun so hot that it might still have been August.

Nellie's father was just as proud of the Prince's acquaintance as she was herself, while Mrs Northover was filled with pleasurable anticipations of going back to quiet, old-world Stamford – a place where nothing ever happens – and referring, in the hearing of her own tea-drinking circle, to “my friend Prince Albert.”

A week passed. Mr and Mrs Northover could not fail to notice how constantly the Prince was in Nellie's society.

Only once, however, did her father mention it to his wife, and then in confidence.

“Nellie seems much struck by the Prince, don't you think? And I'm sure he admires her. He's such a good fellow. I like him. I suppose it's a mere harmless flirtation – and it amuses them both.”

“Fancy, if she became Princess of Hesse-Holstein, James!”

But James Northover only grunted dubiously. He was ignorant of the truth; ignorant of the fact that on the previous night, while they had been taking a stroll along the boulevard after dinner, the Prince, who had been walking with Nellie, had actually whispered to her a declaration of love.

It had all been done so secretly. The pair had been following a little distance behind her worthy parents, and in the star-lit night he had pressed her hand. He had told her hurriedly, whispering low, how fondly he had loved her from the very first moment they had met. How devoted he was to her, and declaring that no woman had ever touched the chord of love in his heart as she had done.

“To-morrow, dearest, we shall part,” he whispered; “but before we do so will you not give me one word of hope – hope that you may some day be mine! Tell me, can you ever reciprocate my love?” he whispered in deep earnestness, as he bent to her, still holding her little hand in his strong grip as they walked.

For a few moments she was silent; her dimpled chin sank upon her breast. He felt her quivering with emotion, and as the light of a gas-lamp fell across her beautiful face he saw tears in her eyes.

She turned to him and lifted her gaze to his. Then he knew the truth without her spoken word. She was his – his own!

“We will keep our secret, dearest,” he said presently. “No one must know. For family reasons it must not yet leak out. Think how lonely I shall be at this hour to-morrow – when you have left!”

“And I also,” she sobbed. “You know – you must have seen – that I love you!”

At that moment her mother turned to look back, and consequently they both instantly assumed an attitude of utter unconcern. And next afternoon when he saw the three off from the Gare du Nord by the Harwich service, neither the estimable Northover, nor his rather obese spouse, had the slightest idea of the true secret of the two young hearts.

Nellie grasped her lover's hand in adieu. Their eyes met for a single instant, and it was all-sufficient. Each trusted the other implicitly. It was surely a charming love-idyll between prince and school-girl.

His Highness remained in Brussels for about three weeks, then crossed to London. He stayed at the Carlton, where, on the night of his arrival, he was visited by the rather ruddy-faced jovial-looking clergyman, the Reverend Thomas Clayton.

It was Charles who announced him, saying in an abrupt manner:

“The Parson's called, your Highness.”

“Show him in,” was the Prince’s reply. “I was expecting him.”

The greeting between Prince Albert and his old clerical friend was hearty, and the two men spent a couple of hours over whisky and sodas and cigarettes, chatting confidentially.

“You’re in love with her, Prince!” laughed his reverend friend.

“Yes, I really and honestly believe I am,” the other admitted, “and especially so, after your report.”

“My inquiries were perfectly satisfactory,” the clergyman said.

“I want to have an excuse for going up to Stamford, but don’t see well how it can be managed,” remarked the Prince pensively, between whiffs of his cigarette.

“With my assistance it might, my dear boy,” replied the Reverend Thomas. “It wants a little thinking over. You’re a prince, remember.”

“Yes,” sighed the other wearily. “That’s just the confounded difficulty. I wonder what the world would say if they knew my secret?”

“Say?” and the clergyman pulled a wry face. “Why bother about what the world thinks? I never do.”

“Yes. But you’re a parson, and a parson can do practically just what he likes.”

“As long as he’s popular with his parishioners.”

And it was not till near midnight, after a dainty snack of supper, served in the Prince’s sitting-room, that the pair parted.

A fortnight later Mr James Northover was agreeably impressed to receive a letter from the Prince stating that a great friend of his, the Rev. Thomas Clayton, of St. Ethelburga’s, Bayswater, was staying in Stamford, convalescent after an illness, and that he was coming to visit him.

The Northover household was thrown into instant confusion. Its head was for inviting the Prince to stay with them, but Mrs Northover and Nellie both declared that he would be far more comfortable at the Stamford Hotel, or at the “George.” Besides, he was a prince, and Alice, the cook, could not possibly do things as was his Highness’s habit to have them done. So a telegram was sent to the Carlton saying that the Northovers were most delighted at the prospect of seeing the Prince again.

Next day his Highness arrived in the big cream-coloured car at the Stamford Hotel, causing great excitement in the town. Charles had come down by the morning train and engaged rooms for his master, and within half an hour of the Prince’s arrival the worthy mayor called and left his card.

The Prince’s first visit, however, was to his old friend, the Rev. Thos. Clayton, whom he found in rather shabby apartments in Rock Terrace seated in an armchair, looking very pale, and quite unlike his usual self.

“I’m sure it’s awfully good of you to become an invalid on my account?” exclaimed the Prince the moment they were alone. “However do you pass your days in this sleepy hollow?”

“By study, my dear boy! Study’s a grand thing! See!” And he exhibited a big dry-as-dust volume on “The Extinct Civilisations of Africa.”

He remained an hour, and then, remounting into the car, drove out along the Tinwell Road, where, half a mile from the town, Mr Northover’s comfortable, red-brick villa was situated. He found the whole family assembled to welcome him – as they had, indeed, been assembled in eager expectation for the past four hours.

Nellie he found looking particularly dainty, with the usual big black velvet bow in her hair, and wearing a neat blouse of cream washing-silk and a short black skirt. She was essentially the type of healthy hockey-playing English girl.

As he grasped her hand and greeted her with formality, he felt it tremble within his grasp. She had kept his secret; of that there was no doubt.

The home life of the Northovers he found quite pleasant. It was so unlike anything he had even been used to. He remained to tea, and he returned there to dine and spend a pleasant evening listening to Nellie’s performances on the piano.

Afterwards, when the ladies had retired as they did discreetly at half-past ten, he sat smoking his “Petroffs” and chatting with Mr Northover.

“I hope you found your friend, the clergyman, better, Prince. Where is he living?”

“Oh, yes; he’s much better, thanks. But he has rather wretched quarters, in a house in Rock Terrace. I’ve urged him to move into an hotel. He says, however, that he hates hotels. He’s such a good fellow – gives nearly all he has to the poor.”

“I suppose he’s down here for fresh air?”

“Yes. He’s very fond of this neighbourhood. Often came here when a boy, I believe.”

“When you go again I’d like to call upon him. We must not allow him to be lonely.”

“I shall call to-morrow. Perhaps you could go with me, after the bank has closed?”

“Yes. At four-thirty. Will you call at the bank for me?”

And so it was arranged.

Punctually at the hour named the Prince stepped from his car before the bank – which was situated in a side street between two shops – and was at once admitted and ushered through to the manager’s room.

Then the pair went on to Rock Terrace to pay the visit. The invalid was much better, and Northover found him a man entirely after his own heart. He was a man of the world, as well as a clergyman.

In the week that followed, Nellie’s father made several visits, and once, on a particularly bright day, the Prince brought the Rev. Thomas round in the car to return the visit at Tinwell Road.

Within ten days the vicar of St. Ethelburga’s, Bayswater, had become quite an intimate friend of the Northovers; so much so, indeed, that they compelled him to give up his rooms in Rock Terrace, and come and stay as their guest. Perhaps it was more for the Prince’s sake they did this – perhaps because they admired Clayton as “a splendid fellow for a parson.”

Anyhow, all this gave the Prince plenty of opportunities for meeting Nellie clandestinely. Instead of going to her music-lesson, or to her hockey-club, or visiting an old schoolfellow, she went daily to a certain secluded spot on the Worthope Road, where she was joined by the man she loved.

Her romance was complete. She adored Albert, utterly and devotedly; while he, on his part, was her slave. On the third day after his arrival in Stamford she had promised to become Princess of Hesse-Holstein, and now they were closely preserving their secret.

The advent of his Highness had raised Mrs Northover to the very pinnacle of the social scale in Stamford. Times without number she tried to obtain from Nellie the true state of affairs, but the girl was sly enough to preserve her lover’s secret.

If the truth were yet known to the family of Hesse-Holstein, all sorts of complications would assuredly ensue. Besides, it would, he felt certain, bring upon him the displeasure of the Emperor. He must go to Potsdam, and announce to the Kaiser his engagement with his own lips.

And so little Nellie Northover, the chosen Princess of Hesse-Holstein, the girl destined to become husband of the ruler of a principality half the size of England, and the wealthiest of the German princes, often wandered the country roads alone, and tried to peer into her brilliant future. What would the girls of Stamford say when they found that Nellie Northover was actually a princess! Why, even the Marchioness who lived at the great ancestral mansion, mentioned in Tennyson’s well-known poem, would then receive her!

And all through the mere failing of a motor-car clutch at that tiny obscure Belgian village.

The Reverend Thomas gradually grew stronger while guest of Mr Northover, and both he and the Prince, together with the Northovers, Mr Henry Ashdown, the assistant manager of the bank who lived on the premises, and others of the Northovers’ friends went for frequent runs in the nobleman’s car.

The Prince never hedged himself in by etiquette. Every friend of Northover at once became his friend; hence, within a fortnight, his Highness was the most popular figure in that quaint old market town.

One afternoon while the Prince and the clergyman were walking together up the High Street, they passed a thin, pale-faced man in dark grey flannels.

Glances of recognition were exchanged, but no word was uttered.

“Max is at the ‘George,’ isn’t he?” asked the Prince.

“Yes,” replied his companion. “Arrived the night before last, and having a particularly dull time, I should think.”

“So should I,” laughed the Prince.

That evening, the two ladies being away at the Milton Hound Show, they took Northover and his assistant, Ashdown, after their business, over to Peterborough to bring them back. Ashdown was some ten years younger than his chief, and rather fond of his whisky and soda. At the Great Northern Hotel in Peterborough they found the ladies; and on their return to Stamford the whole party dined together at the Prince’s hotel, an old-fashioned hostelry with old-fashioned English fare.

And so another fortnight went past. The autumn winds grew more chilly, and the leaves fell with the advance of October.

Nellie constantly met the Prince, in secret, the only person knowing the truth besides themselves being the Parson, who had now become one of the girl’s particular friends.

While the Prince was dressing for dinner one evening, Charles being engaged in putting the links in his shirt-cuffs, he suddenly asked:

“Max is still in Stamford, I suppose?”

“I believe so, your Highness.”

“Well, I want you to take this up to London to-night, Charles.” And he drew from a locked drawer a small sealed packet about four inches square, looking like jewellery. “You’ll see the address on it. Take it there, then go to the Suffolk Hotel, in Suffolk Street, Strand, and wait till I send you instructions to return.”

“Very well, your Highness,” answered the man who always carried out his master’s instructions with blind obedience.

Next day, in conversation with Mr Northover, the Prince expressed regret that he had been compelled to discharge his man Charles at a moment’s notice.

“The man is a thief,” he said briefly. “I lost a valuable scarf-pin the other day – one given me by the Emperor. But I never suspected him until a few days ago when I received an anonymous letter telling me that my trusted man, Charles, had, before I took him into my service, been convicted of theft, and was, indeed, one of a gang of clever swindlers! I made inquiries, and discovered this to be the actual truth.”

“By Jove!” remarked the Reverend Thomas. “Think what an escape the Prince has had! All his jewellery might have suddenly disappeared!”

“How very fortunate you were warned!” declared Mr Northover. “Your correspondent was anonymous, you say?”

“Yes. Some one must have recognised him in London, I think, and, therefore, given me warning. A most disagreeable affair – I assure you.”

“Then you’ve lost the Emperor’s present?” asked Nellie.

“Yes,” sighed the Prince; “It’s gone for ever. I’ve given notice to the police. They’re sending a detective from London to see me, I believe, but I feel certain I shall never see it again.”

This conversation was repeated by Mrs Northover to her husband, when he returned from business that evening.

About the same hour, however, while the Prince was smoking with his clerical friend in his private room at the hotel, the waiter entered, saying that a Mr Mason had called upon his Highness.

“That’s the man from Scotland Yard!” exclaimed the Prince aloud. “Show him up.”

A few moments later a rather pale-faced, fair-haired man in shabby brown tweeds was ushered in, and the waiter, who knew the story of Charles’s sudden discharge, retired.

“Good evening, Prince,” exclaimed the new-comer. “I got your wire and came at once.” At the same time he produced from his pocket a small cartridge envelope containing something slightly bulky, but carefully sealed.

“Right! Go over there, Max, and help yourself to a drink. You’re at the ‘George,’ I suppose?”

“No. I’ve got a room here – so as to be near you – in case of necessity, you know,” he added meaningly.

The two men exchanged glances.

It was evident at once that Mr Mason was no stranger, for he helped himself to a cigarette uninvited, and, mixing a small drink, drained it off at a single gulp.

Then, after chatting for a quarter of an hour or so, he went out “just to get a wash,” as he put it.

The Prince, when he had gone, turned over the small packet in his hand without opening it.

Then he rose, walked to the window, and in silence looked out upon the old church opposite, deep in thought.

The Parson, watching him without a word, knit his brows, and pursed his lips.

Next morning the Prince sent Garrett with the car to London, as he wanted some alteration to the hood, and that afternoon, as he crossed the marketplace, he again met Max. Neither spoke. A glance of recognition was all that passed between them. Meanwhile, the detective from London had been making a good many inquiries in Stamford, concerning the associates and friends of the discharged valet Charles.

The latter was, the detective declared, an old hand, and his Highness had been very fortunate in getting rid of him when he did.

That evening Mr and Mrs Ashdown invited the Prince and the clergyman to dinner, at which they were joined by the sweet-faced Nellie and her father and mother. With true provincial habit, the party broke up at ten-thirty, and while the Parson walked home with the Northovers, his Highness lit a cigar and strolled back to the hotel alone.

Until nearly two o’clock he sat smoking, reading, and thinking – thinking always of pretty Nellie – and now and then glancing at the clock. After the church-bell had struck two he had a final “peg,” and then turned in.

Next morning, when the waiter brought his coffee, the man blurted forth breathlessly:

“There’s been a great robbery, your Highness, last night. The London and North Western Bank has been entered, and they say that four thousand pounds in gold has been stolen.”

“What!” gasped the Prince, springing up. “Mr Northover’s bank?”

“Yes, sir. The whole town is in an uproar! I’ve told Mr Mason, and he’s gone down to see. They say that a week ago a youngish man from London took the empty shop next door to the bank, and it’s believed the thieves were secreted in there. There doesn’t seem any evidence of any of the locks being tampered with, for the front door was opened with a key, and they had keys of both the doors of the strong-room. The police are utterly mystified, for Mr Northover has one key, and Mr Ashdown the other, and the doors can’t be opened unless they are both there together. Both gentlemen say their keys have never left them, and none of the burglar-alarms rang.”

“Then it’s an absolute mystery – eh,” remarked the Prince, utterly astonished. “Perhaps that scoundrel Charles has had something to do with it! He went to the bank for me on several occasions!”

“That’s what Mr Mason and the other police officers think, sir,” the waiter said. “And it seems that the men must have got out the coin, brought it into the empty shop, carried it through the back of the premises and packed it into a dark-green motor-car. A policeman out on the Worthorpe Road, saw the car pass just before two o’clock this morning. There were two men in it, besides the driver.”

The Prince dressed hastily, and was about to rush down to the bank to condole with Northover when the latter burst into his room in a great state of mind.

“It’s an absolute mystery, and so daring!” he declared. “The thieves must have had duplicate keys of the whole bank! They left all the notes, but cleared out every bit of gold coin. We had some unusually heavy deposits lately, and they’ve taken three thousand four hundred and thirty-two pounds!”

“What about that man who took the shop next door?”

“He’s perfectly respectable, the police assure me. He knows nothing about it. He’s hardly finished stocking the place with groceries, and opens the day after to-morrow. His name is Newman.”

“Then how did they get their booty away?”

“That’s the mystery. Unless through the back of the shop next door. No motor-car came along the street in the night, for Ashdown’s child was ill, and Mrs Ashdown was up all night and heard nothing. The means by which they got such a heavy lot of coin away so neatly is as mysterious as how they obtained the keys.”

“Depend upon it that my scoundrelly valet has had a finger in this!” the Prince declared. “I’ll assist you to try and find him. I happen to know some of his friends in London.”

Northover was delighted, and at the police-station the superintendent thanked his Highness for his kind promise of assistance. Mr Mason was ubiquitous, and the parson full of astonishment at the daring coup of the unknown thieves. Two bank directors came down from town in the afternoon, and after a discussion, a full report was telegraphed to New Scotland Yard.

That same evening the Prince went up to London, accompanied by the keen-eyed Mr Mason, leaving the Parson still the guest of Mr Northover.

The latter, however, would scarcely have continued to entertain him, had he known that, on arrival at King’s Cross, his Highness and Mr Mason took a cab to a certain house in Hereford Road, Bayswater, where Charles and Garrett were eagerly awaiting him. In the room were two other men whom the Prince shook by the hand and warmly congratulated.

Charles opened the door of the adjoining room, a poorly furnished bedroom, where stood a chest of drawers. One drawer after the other he opened.

They were full of bags of golden sovereigns!

“Those impressions you sent us, Prince, gave us a lot of trouble,” declared the elder of the two men, with a pronounced American accent. “The keys were very difficult to make, and when you sent us word that the parson had tried them and they wouldn’t act, we began to fear that it was no go. But we did the trick all right, after all, didn’t we? Guess we spent a pretty miserable week in Stamford, but you seemed to be having quite a good time. Where’s the Sky-pilot?”

“He’s remaining – convalescent, you know. And as for Bob Newman, he’ll be compelled to carry on that confounded grocery business next door for at least a couple of months – before he fails, and shuts up.”

“Well,” exclaimed the man Mason, whom everybody in Stamford – even the police themselves – believed to be a detective. “It was a close shave! You know, Prince, when you came out of the bank after dinner and I slipped in past you, I only just got into the shadow before that slip of a girl of Northover’s ran down the stairs after you. I saw you give her a kiss in the darkness.”

“She deserved a kiss, the little dear,” replied his Highness, “for without her we could never have brought off so complete a thing.”

“Ah! you always come in for the good things,” Charles remarked.

“Because I’m a prince,” was his Highness’s reply.

The police are still looking for the Prince’s valet, and his Highness has, of course, assisted them. Charles, however, got away to Copenhagen to a place of complete safety, and he being the only person suspected, it is very unlikely that the bank will ever see their money again – neither is Nellie Northover ever likely to see her prince.

## Chapter Three

### The Mysterious Sixty

When the smart chauffeur, Garrett, entered the cosy chambers of his Highness Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein, alias Charles Fotheringham, alias Henry Tremlett, in Dover Street, Piccadilly, he found him stretched lazily on the couch before the fire. He had exchanged his dinner jacket for an easy coat of brown velvet; between his lips was a Russian cigarette of his pet brand, and at his elbow a brandy and soda.

“Ah! Garrett,” he exclaimed as the chauffeur entered. “Come here, and sit down. Shut the door first. I want to talk to you.”

As chauffeur to the Prince and his ingenious companions, Garrett had met with many queer adventures and been in many a tight corner. To this day he wonders he was not “pinched” by the police a dozen times, and certainly would have been if it were not that the gay, good-looking, devil-may-care Prince Albert never left anything to chance. When a *coup* was to be made he thought out every minute detail, and took precaution against every risk of detection. To his marvellous ingenuity and wonderful foresight Garrett, with his friends, owed his liberty.

During the three years through which he had thrown in his lot with that select little circle of “crooks,” he had really had a very interesting time, and had driven them thousands of miles, mostly on the Continent, in the big “Mercédès” or the “sixty” six-cylinder “Minerva.”

His Highness’s share in the plunder had been very considerable. At his bankers he possessed quite a respectable balance, and he lived in easy affluence the life of a prince. In the drawing-rooms of London and Paris he was known as essentially a ladies’ man; while in Italy he was usually Henry Tremlett, of London, and in France he was Charles Fotheringham, an Anglo-Frenchman and Chevalier of the Légion d’Honneur.

“Look here, Garrett,” he said, raising himself on his elbow and looking the man in the face as he tossed his cigarette in the grate. “To-day, let’s see, is December 16. You must start in the car tomorrow for San Remo. We shall spend a week or two there.”

“To-morrow!” the chauffeur echoed. “The roads from Paris down to the Riviera are pretty bad just now. I saw in the paper yesterday that there’s heavy snow around Valence.”

“Snow, or no snow, we must go,” the Prince said decisively. “We have a little matter in hand down there – you understand?” he remarked, his dark eyes still fixed upon the chauffeur.

The man wondered what was the nature of the *coup* intended.

“And now,” he went on, “let me explain something else. There may be some funny proceedings down at San Remo. But just disregard everything you see, and don’t trouble your head about the why, or wherefore. You’re paid to be chauffeur, Garrett – and paid well, too, by your share of the profits – so nothing else concerns you. It isn’t, sparklers we’re after this time – it’s something else.”

The Prince who, speaking English so well, turned his birth and standing to such good account, never told the chauffeur of his plans. His confederates, indeed, were generally kept completely in the dark until the very last moment. Therefore, they were all very frequently puzzled by what seemed to be extraordinary and motiveless actions by the leader of the party of adventurers.

The last *coup* made was in the previous month, at Aix-les-Bains, the proceeds being sold to the old Jew in Amsterdam for four thousand pounds sterling, this sum being divided up between the Prince, the Parson, a neat-ankled little Parisienne named Valentine Déjardin, and Garrett. And they were now going to spend a week or two in that rather dull and much over-rated little Italian seaside town, where the sharper and crook flourish to such a great extent in spring – San Remo.

They were evidently about to change their tactics, for it was not diamonds they were after, but something else. Garrett wondered as the Count told him to help himself to a whisky and soda what that “something else” would turn out to be.

“I daresay you’ll be a bit puzzled,” he said, lazily lighting a fresh cigarette, “but don’t trouble your head about the why or wherefore. Leave that to me. Stay at the Hotel Regina at San Remo – that big place up on the hill – you know it. You’ll find the Parson there. Let’s see, when we were there a year ago I was Tremlett, wasn’t I? – so I must be that again, I suppose.”

He rose from his couch, stretched himself, and pulling a bookcase from the high old-fashioned wainscoting slid back one of the white enamelled panels disclosing a secret cavity wherein, Garrett knew, reposed a quantity of stolen jewels that he had failed to get rid of to the Jew diamond dealer in Amsterdam, who acted in most cases as receiver.

The chauffeur saw within that small cavity, of about a foot square, a number of little parcels each wrapped in tissue paper – jewels for which the police of Europe for a year or so had been hunting high and low. Putting his hand into the back the Prince produced a bundle of banknotes, from which he counted one “fifty” and ten fivers, and handed them to his man.

“They’re all right. You’ll want money, for I think that, after all, you’d better go to San Remo as a gentleman and owner of the car. Both the Parson and I will be perfect strangers to you – you understand?”

“Perfectly,” was Garrett’s reply, as he watched him replace the notes, push back the panel into its place, and move the bookcase into its original position.

“Then get away to-morrow night by Newhaven and Dieppe,” he said. “If I were you I’d go by Valence and Die, instead of by Grenoble. There’s sure to be less snow there. Wire me when you get down to Cannes.” And he pushed across his big silver box of cigarettes, one of which the chauffeur took, and seating himself, listened to his further instructions. They, however, gave no insight into the adventure which was about to be undertaken.

At half-past seven on the following night, with his smartly-cut clothes packed in two suit-cases, his chauffeur’s dress discarded for a big leather-lined coat of dark-green frieze and motor-cap and goggles, and a false number-plate concealed beneath the cushion, Garrett drew the car out of the garage in Oxford Street, and sped along the Embankment and over Westminster Bridge on the first stage of his long and lonely journey.

The night was dark, with threatening rain, but out in the country the big searchlight shone brilliantly, and he tore along the Brighton road while the rhythmic splutter of his open exhaust awakened the echoes of the country-side. With a loud shriek of the siren he passed village after village until at Brighton he turned to the left along that very dangerous switchback road that leads to Newhaven.

How he shipped the car, or how for four weary days – such was the hopeless state of the roads – he journeyed due south, has no bearing upon this narrative of an adventurer’s adventure. Fortunately the car ran magnificently, the engines beating in perfect time against rain and blizzard, and tyre-troubles were few. The road – known well to him, for he had traversed it with the Prince at least a dozen times to and from Monte Carlo – was snow-covered right from Lyons down to Aix in Provence, making progress difficult, and causing him constant fear lest he should run into some deep drift.

At last, however, in the bright Riviera sunshine, so different to the London weather he had left behind five days ago, and with the turquoise Mediterranean lying calm and picturesque on his right, he found himself passing along the Lower Corniche from Nice through Beaulieu, Monaco, and Mentone to Ventimiglia, the Italian frontier. Arrived there, he paid the Customs deposit at the little roadside bureau of the Italian dogana, got a leaden seal impressed upon the front of the chassis, and drew away up the hill again for a few short miles through Bordighera and Ospedaletti to the picturesque little town of San Remo, which so bravely but vainly endeavours to place itself forward as the Nice of the Italian Riviera.

The Hotel Regina, the best and most fashionable, stands high above the sea-road, embowered in palms, oranges, and flowers, and as Garrett turned with a swing into the gateway and ran up the steep incline on his “second,” his arrival, dirty and travel-worn as he was, caused some stir among the smartly dressed visitors taking their tea *al fresco*.

With an air of nonchalance the gentleman chauffeur sprang out, gave over the mud-covered car to a man from the hotel garage, and entering the place, booked a pretty but expensive sitting-room and bedroom overlooking the sea.

Having tubbed and exchanged his rough tweeds for grey flannels and a straw hat, he descended to see if he could find the Parson, who, by the list in the hall, he saw was among the guests. He strolled about the town, and looked in at a couple of *cafés*, but saw nothing of the Prince’s clever confederate.

Not until he went in to dinner did he discover him.

Wearing a faultless clerical collar and perfect-fitting clerical coat, and on his nose gold pince-nez, he was sitting a few tables away, dining with two well-dressed ladies – mother and daughter he took them to be, though afterwards he found they were aunt and niece. The elder woman, handsome and well-preserved, evidently a foreigner from her very dark hair and fine eyes, was dressed handsomely in black, with a bunch of scarlet roses in her corsage. As far as Garrett could see, she wore no jewellery.

The younger of the pair was certainly not more than nineteen, fair-haired, with a sweet girlish face, blue eyes almost childlike in their softness, and a pretty dimpled cheek, and a perfectly formed mouth that invited kisses. She was in pale carnation – a colour that suited her admirably, and in her bodice, cut slightly low, was a bunch of those sweet-smelling flowers which grow in such profusion along the Italian coast as to supply the European markets in winter.

Both women were looking at Garrett, noticing that he was a fresh arrival.

In a Riviera hotel, where nearly every guest makes a long stay, a fresh arrival early in the season is always an event, and he or she is discussed and criticised, approved or condemned. Garrett could see that the two ladies were discussing him with the Reverend Thomas, who glared at him for a moment through his glasses as though he had never before seen him in his life, and then with some words to his companions, he went on eating his fish.

He knew quite well of Garrett’s advent, but part of the mysterious game was that they did not recognise each other.

When dinner was over, and everyone went into the hall to lounge and take coffee, Garrett inquired of the hall-porter the names of the two ladies in question.

“The elder one, m’sieur,” he replied, in French, in a confidential tone, “is Roumanian, the Princess Charles of Krajova, and the young lady is her niece, Mademoiselle Dalrymple.”

“Dalrymple!” he echoed. “Then mademoiselle must be English!”

“Certainly, m’sieur.”

And Garrett turned away, wondering with what ulterior object our friend “the Parson” was ingratiating himself with La Princesse.

Next day, the gay devil-may-care Prince, giving his name as Mr Henry Tremlett, of London, arrived, bringing the faithful Charles, to whose keen observation more than one successful *coup* had owed its genesis. There were now four of them staying in the hotel, but with what object Garrett could not discern.

The Prince gave no sign of recognition to the Parson or the chauffeur. He dined at a little table alone, and was apparently as interested in the two women as Garrett was himself.

Garrett’s main object was to create interest, so acting upon the instructions the Prince had given him in London, he posed as the owner of the fine car, swaggered in the hall in his big coat and cap, and took runs up and down the white winding coast-road, envied by many of the guests, who, he knew, dearly wanted to explore the beauties of the neighbourhood.

It was not, therefore, surprising that more than one of the guests of both sexes got into casual conversation with Garrett, and among them, on the second day after his arrival, the Princess Charles of Krajova.

She was, he found, an enthusiastic motorist, and as they stood that sunny afternoon by the car, which was before the hotel, she made many inquiries regarding the long stretch from Dieppe to the Italian frontier. While they were chatting, the Parson, with Mademoiselle approached. The Rev. Thomas started a conversation, in which the young lady joined. The latter Garrett decided was very charming. Her speech was that of an educated English girl only lately from her school, yet she had evidently been well trained for her position in society, and though so young, carried herself extremely well.

As yet, nobody had spoken to Tremlett. He seemed to keep himself very much to himself. Why, the chauffeur wondered?

That evening he spent in the hall, chatting with the Parson and the ladies. He had invited them all to go for a run on the morrow by the seashore as far as Savona, then inland to Ceva, and back by Ormeo and Oneglia, and they had accepted enthusiastically. Then, when aunt and niece rose to retire, he invited the Rev. Thomas up to his sitting-room for a final whisky and soda.

When they were alone with the door shut, Clayton said:

“Look here, Garrett! This is a big game we’re playing. The Prince lies low, while we work it. To-morrow you must attract the girl, while I make myself agreeable to the aunt – a very decent old body, after all. Recollect, you must not fall in love with the girl. She admires you, I know.”

“Not very difficult to fall in love with her,” laughed the other. “She’s uncommonly good-looking.”

“Yes, but be careful that you don’t make a fool of yourself, and really allow yourself to be smitten,” he urged.

“But what is the nature of this fresh game?” Garrett inquired, eager to ascertain what was intended.

“Don’t worry about that, my dear fellow,” was his reply. “Only make love to the girl. Leave the rest to his Highness and myself.”

And so it came about that next day, with the pretty Winnie – for that was her name – seated at his side, Garrett drove the car along to Savona, chatting merrily with her, and discovering her to be most *chic* and charming. Her parents lived in London, she informed him, in Queen’s Gate. Her father was in Parliament, sitting for one of the Welsh boroughs.

The run was delightful, and was the commencement of a very pleasant friendship. He saw that his little friend was in no way averse to a violent flirtation, and indeed, he spent nearly the whole of the next morning with her in the garden.

The chauffeur had already disregarded the Parson’s advice, and had fallen desperately in love with her.

As they sat in the garden she told him that her mother was a Roumanian lady, of Bucharest, whose sister had married the enormously wealthy landowner, Prince Charles of Krajova. For the past two years she had lived in Paris, Vienna and Bucharest, with her aunt, and they were now at San Remo to spend the whole winter.

“But,” she added, with a wistful look, “I far prefer England. I was at school at Folkestone, and had a most jolly time there. I was so sorry to leave to come out here.”

“Then you know but little of London?”

“Very little,” she declared. “I know Folkestone better. We used to walk on the Leas every day, or play hockey and tennis. I miss my games so very much,” she added, raising her fine big eyes to his.

At his invitation she walked down to the town and back before luncheon, but not without some hesitation, as perhaps she thought her aunt might not like it. On the Promenade they met his Highness, but he gave them no sign of recognition.

“That gentleman is staying at our hotel,” she remarked after he had passed. “I saw on the list that he is a Mr Tremlett, from London.”

“Yes – I also saw that,” remarked the chauffeur. “Looks a decent kind of fellow.”

“Rather a fop, I think,” she declared. “My aunt, however, is anxious to know him, so if you make his acquaintance, will you please introduce him to us?”

“I’ll be most delighted, of course, Miss Dalrymple,” he said, inwardly congratulating himself upon his good fortune.

And an hour later he wrote a note to the Prince and posted it, telling him of what the girl had said.

While the Parson monopolised the Princess, Garrett spent most of the time in the company of Winifred Dalrymple. That afternoon he took the Parson and the ladies for a run on the car, and that evening, it being Christmas Eve, there was a dance, during which he was on several occasions her partner.

She waltzed splendidly, and Garrett found himself each hour more deeply in love with her. During the dance, he managed to feign to scrape acquaintance with the Prince, and presented him to his dainty little friend, as well as her aunt, whereat the latter at once went out of her way to be most gracious and affable. Already the handsome Tremlett knew most of the ladies in the hotel, as his coming and going always caused a flutter within the hearts of the gentler sex, for he was essentially a ladies’ man. Indeed, to his easy courtly manner towards them was due the great success of his many ingenious schemes.

He would kiss a woman one moment and rifle her jewel-case the next, so utterly unscrupulous was he. He was assuredly a perfect type of the well-bred, audacious young adventurer.

While the dance was proceeding Garrett was standing with Winifred in the hall, when they heard the sound of an arriving motor-car coming up the incline from the road, and going to the door he saw that it was a very fine sixty horse-power “Fiat” limousine. There were no passengers, but the driver was a queer grey-haired, hunchbacked old man. His face was splashed, his grey goat’s-skin coat was muddy, like the car, for it was evident that he had come a long distance.

As he entered the big brilliantly-lit hall, his small black eyes cast a searching look around. Winifred, whom Garrett was at that moment leading back to the ballroom, started quickly. Had she, he wondered, recognised him? If so, why had she started. That she was acquainted with the stranger, and that she did not wish to meet him he quickly saw, for a few moments later she whispered something to the Princess, whose face instantly changed, and the pair pleading fatigue a few minutes later, ascended in the lift to their own apartments.

So curious was the incident, that Garrett determined to ascertain something regarding the queer, wizened-faced old hunchback who acted as chauffeur, but to his surprise when he returned to the hall, he found the car had already left. The little old man in the fur motor-coat had merely called to make inquiry whether a certain German baron was staying in the hotel, and had then left immediately.

He was much puzzled at the marked uneasiness of both the Princess and Winifred at the appearance of the mysterious “sixty.” Indeed, he saw her Highness’s maid descend the stairs half an hour later, evidently in order to gather some facts concerning the movements of the hunchback. Prince and Parson were both playing bridge, therefore Garrett was unable to relate to them what he had seen, so he retired to bed wondering what the truth might really be.

Morning dawned. The Prince and his friend were both down unusually early, walking in the garden, and discussing something very seriously. But its nature they kept from their chauffeur.

The morning he spent with Winifred, who looked very sweet and charming in her white serge gown, white shoes and big black hat. They idled in the garden among the orange groves for an hour, and then walked down to the town and back.

At luncheon a surprise awaited them, for quite close to Garrett sat the little old man, clean and well-dressed, eating his meal and apparently taking no notice of anybody. Yet he saw what effect the

man's presence had produced upon the Princess and her niece, who having taken their seats could not well escape.

Where was the big "sixty"? It was certainly not in the garage at the hotel! And why had the old man returned?

Reviewing all the circumstances, together with what the Prince had explained to him in Dover Street, he found himself utterly puzzled. The whole affair was an enigma. What were the intentions of his ingenious and unscrupulous friends? The Prince had, he recollected, distinctly told him that diamonds were not in the present instance the object of their manoeuvres.

About three o'clock that afternoon he invited the Princess and her pretty niece to go out for a run in the car to Taggia, the road to which first runs along by the sea, and afterwards turns inland up a beautiful fertile valley. They accepted, but both Prince and Parson pleaded other engagements, therefore he took the two ladies alone.

The afternoon was bright and warm, with that blue sky and deep blue sea which is so characteristic of the Riviera, and the run to Taggia was delightful. They had coffee at a clean little osteria – coffee that was not altogether good, but quite passable – and then with Winifred up beside him, Garrett started to run home in the sundown.

They had not gone more than a couple of miles when, of a sudden, almost before he could realise it, Garrett was seized by a contraction of the throat so violent that he could not breathe. He felt choking. The sensation was most unusual, for he broke out into a cold perspiration, and his head beginning to reel, he slowed down and put on the brake, for they were travelling at a brisk pace, but beyond that he remembered absolutely nothing. All he knew was that an excruciating pain shot through his heart, and then in an instant all was blank!

Of only one other thing he had a hazy recollection, and it was this. Just at the moment when he lost consciousness the girl at his side, leant towards him, and took the steering-wheel, saying:

"Let go, you fool! – let go, will you!" her words being followed by a weird peal of laughter.

The darkness was impenetrable. For many hours Garrett had remained oblivious to everything. Yet as he slowly struggled back to consciousness he became aware that his legs were benumbed, and that water was lapping about him. He was lying in a cramped position, so cramped that to move was impossible. He was chilled to the bone. For a full hour he lay half-conscious, and wondering. The pains in his head were awful. He raised his hand, and discovered a nasty wound upon his left temple. Then he at last realised the astounding truth. He was lying upon rocks on the seashore, and it was night! How long he had been there, or how he had come there he had no idea.

That woman's laughter rang in his ears. It was a laugh of triumph, and caused him to suspect strongly that he had been the victim of feminine treachery. But with what motive?

Was it possible that at Taggia, while he had been outside looking around the car, something had been placed in his coffee! He recollected that it tasted rather bitter. But where was the car? Where were the Princess and her pretty niece?

It was a long time before his cramped limbs were sufficiently supple to enable him to walk, and then in the faint grey dawn he managed to crawl along a white unfamiliar high road that ran beside the rocky shore. For nearly two hours he walked in his wet clothes until he came to a tiny town which he discovered, was called Voltri, and was quite a short distance from Genoa.

The fascinating Winifred had evidently driven the car with his unconscious form covered up in the tonneau for some time before the pair had deposited him in the water, their intention being that the sea should itself dispose of his body.

For an hour he remained in the little inn drying his clothes and having his wound attended to, and then when able to travel, he took train back to San Remo, arriving late in the afternoon. He found to his astonishment he had remained unconscious at the edge of the tideless sea for about thirty hours.

His bandaged head was put down by the guests as due to an accident in the car, for he made no explanation. Presently, however, the hotel proprietor came to his room, and asked the whereabouts of

the Princess and her niece, as they had not been seen since they left with him. In addition, the maid had suddenly disappeared, while the party owed a little bill of nearly one hundred pounds sterling.

“And Mr Tremlett?” Garrett asked. “He is still here, of course?”

“No, signore,” was the courtly Italian’s reply. “He left in a motor-car with Mr Clayton and his valet late the same night.”

Their destination was unknown. The little old hunchback had also left, Garrett was informed.

A week later, as Garrett entered the cosy sitting-room in Dover Street the Prince sprang from his chair, exclaiming:

“By Jove, Garrett! I’m glad to see you back. We began to fear that you’d met with foul play. What happened to you? Sit down, and tell me. Where’s the car?”

The chauffeur was compelled to admit his ignorance of its whereabouts, and then related his exciting and perilous adventure.

“Yes,” replied the handsome young adventurer, gaily. “It was a crooked bit of business, but we needn’t trouble further about the car, Garrett, for the fact is we’ve exchanged our ‘forty’ for that old hunchback’s mysterious ‘sixty.’ It’s at Meunier’s garage in Paris. But, of course,” he laughed, “you didn’t know who the hunchback really was. It was Finch Grey.”

“Finch Grey!” gasped Garrett, amazed, for he was the most renowned and expert thief in the whole of Europe.

“Yes,” he said, “we went to San Remo to meet him. It was like this. The Reverend Thomas was in Milan and got wind of a little *coup* at the Banca d’Italia which Finch Grey had arranged. The plot was one night to attack the strong-room of the bank, a tunnel to which had already been driven from a neighbouring house. The proceeds of this robbery – notes and gold – were to be brought down to San Remo by Finch Grey in his ‘sixty,’ the idea being to then meet the Princess and her niece, who were really only members of his gang. Our idea was to get friendly with the two ladies, so that when the car full of gold and notes arrived we should have an opportunity of getting hold of it. Our plans, however, were upset in two particulars, by the fact that a few days prior to my arrival the pair had quarrelled with the old hunchback, and secondly, because a friend of the Princess’s, staying at the hotel, had recognised you as a ‘crook.’ By some means the two women suspected that, on Finch Grey’s appearance, our intention was either to demand part of the proceeds of the bank robbery or expose them to the police. Therefore they put something in your coffee, the girl drove the car to the spot where you found yourself, and then they escaped to Genoa, and on to Rome. Finch Grey, who did not know who we were, was highly concerned with us regarding the non-return of the ladies. We suggested that we should go out in his ‘sixty’ with him to search for them, and he, fearing that you had met with an accident, consented. The rest was easy,” he laughed.

“How?”

“Well, we let him get half way to Oneglia, when we just slipped a handkerchief with a little perfume upon it, over his nose and mouth, and a few minutes later we laid him quietly down behind a wall. Then I turned the car back to where we had previously stored some pots of white paint and a couple of big brushes, and in an hour had transformed the colour of the car and changed its identification-plates. Imagine our joy when we found the back locker where the tools should have been crammed with bags of gold twenty lire pieces, while under the inside seat we found a number of neat packets of fifty and one-hundred and five-hundred lire notes. Just after midnight we slipped back through San Remo, and two days ago arrived safely in Paris with our valuable freight. Like to see some of it?” he added, and rising he pushed back the bookcase, opened the panel and took out several bundles of Italian notes. I saw also within a number of small canvas bags of gold.

“By this time, Garrett,” he added, laughing and pouring me out a drink, “old Finch Grey is gnashing his teeth, for he cannot invoke the aid of the police, and the women who intended to be avenged upon us for our daring are, no doubt, very sorry they ran away with our car, which, after all,

was not nearly such a good one as the mysterious 'sixty.' Theirs wasn't a particularly cheery journey, was it?" and lifting his glass he added, "So let's wish them very good luck!"

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Man with the Red Circle**

Another story related by Garrett, the chauffeur, is worth telling, for it is not without its humorous side.

It occurred about six weeks after the return of the party from San Remo.

It was dismal and wet in London, one of those damp yellow days with which we, alas I are too well acquainted.

About two o'clock in the afternoon, attired in yellow fishermen's oil-skins instead of his showy grey livery, Garrett sat at the wheel of the new "sixty" six-cylinder car of Finch Grey's outside the Royal Automobile Club, in Piccadilly, bade adieu to the exemplary Bayswater parson, who stood upon the steps, and drew along to the corner of Park Lane, afterwards turning towards the Marble Arch, upon the first stage of a long and mysterious journey.

When it is said that the journey was a mysterious one Garrett was compelled to admit that, ever since he had been in the service of Prince Albert of Hesse-Holstein his journeys had been made for the most part with a motive that, until the moment of their accomplishment, remained to him a mystery. His employer gave him orders, but he never allowed him to know his plans. He was paid to hold his tongue and obey. What mattered if his Highness, who was such a well-known figure in the world of automobilism was not a Highness at all; or whether the Rev. Thomas Clayton held no clerical charge in Bayswater. He, Garrett, was the Prince's chauffeur, paid to close his ears and his eyes to everything around him, and to drive whatever lady who might be in the car hither and thither, just as his employer or his audacious friends required.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.