CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH HUGH DRUMMOND ARRIVES AT MAYBICK HALL

Two things saved Drummond from what was practically certain death—the heavy coat he was wearing, and the fact that he rolled sideways clear of the steering-wheel as soon as the man let go of him with his hand. Had he remained behind the wheel he must infallibly have gone to the bottom with the car, and at that point where the river narrowed to come through the piers of the bridge the water was over twenty feet deep. He had sufficient presence of mind to take a deep breath as the car shot downwards; then he felt the water close over his head. And if before his struggles to move had been fierce—now that the end seemed at hand they became desperate. The desire to get clear—to give one kick with his legs and come to the surface roused him to one superhuman effort. He felt as if the huge heave he gave with his legs against the floorboards must send him flying to the top; afterwards he realised that this vast effort had been purely mental—the actual physical result had been practically negligible. But not quite, it had done something, and the coat did the rest.
With that one last supreme throw for life his mind had overcome the effects of the poison to the extent of forcing his legs to give one spasmodic little kick. He floated clear of the car, and slowly—how slowly only his bursting lungs could testify—the big coat brought him to the surface. For a moment or two he could do nothing save draw in deep gulps of air; then he realised that the danger was not yet past. For he couldn't shout, he could do nothing save float and drift, and the current had carried him clear of the bridge out of sight of those on top. And his mind was quite clear enough to realise that the coat which had saved him, once it became sodden would just as surely drown him.

He could see men with lanterns on the bridge; he could hear them shouting and talking. And then he saw a boat come back from the ship that had passed through just before he went over the edge in his car. Surely they'd pull down-stream to look for him, he thought in an agony of futile anger; surely they couldn't be such fools as to go on pulling about just by the bridge when it was obvious he wasn't there. But since they thought that he was at the bottom in his car, and blasphemous language was already being wafted at them by the skipper of the vessel for the useless delay, with a sinking heart Drummond saw the boat turn round and disappear up-stream into the darkness. Men with lanterns still stood on the bridge, but he was far beyond the range of their lights, and he was drifting farther every minute. It was just a question of time now—and it couldn't
be very long either. He could see that his legs had gone down well below the surface, and only the air that still remained in the buttoned-up part of his overcoat kept his head out and his shoulders near the top. And when that was gone—the end. He had done all he could; there was nothing for it now but to wait for the inevitable finish. And though he had been credibly informed that under such circumstances the whole of a man’s life passes in rapid review before him, his sole and only thought was an intense desire to get his hands on Peterson again.

For a while he pictured the scene with a wealth of pleasant detail, until a sudden change in his immediate surroundings began to take place. At first he could not realise what had happened; then little by little it began to dawn on him what had occurred. Up to date the water in which he floated had seemed motionless to him; he had been drifting in it at exactly the same velocity as the current. And now, suddenly, he saw that the water was going past him. For a moment or two he failed to understand the significance of the fact; then wild hope surged up in his mind. For a time he stared fixedly at the bridge, and the hope became a certainty. He was not drifting any farther from it; he was stationary; he was aground. He could feel nothing; he could see nothing—but the one stupendous fact remained that he was aground. Life took on another lease—anything might happen now. If only he could remain there till the morning they would see him from the bridge, and there
ARRIVES AT MAYBRICK HALL 235

seemed no reason why he shouldn't. The water still flowed sluggishly past him, broken with the faintest ripple close to his head. So he reasoned that it must be very shallow where he was, and being an incurable optimist, he resumed, with even fuller details, his next meeting with Peterson.

But not for long. Starting from his waist and spreading downwards to his feet and outwards through his shoulders to his hands there slowly began to creep the most agonising cramp. The torture was indescribable, and the sweat dripped off his forehead into his eyes. And gradually it dawned on him that the effects of the poison were wearing off. Sensation was returning to his limbs; even through his agony he could feel that he was resting against something under the water. Then he heard a strange noise, and realised that it was he himself groaning with the pain. The use of his voice had come back. He spoke a sentence aloud, and made certain.

And then Drummond deliberately decided on doing one of those things which Peterson had always failed to legislate for in the past. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have shouted themselves hoarse under such circumstances; not so Drummond. Had he done so a message would have reached Peterson in just so long as it took a trunk call to get through; the man called Franz was still assiduously helping the gate-keeper on the bridge. And the Reverend Theodosius Longmoor and his little Janet would have vanished into the night, leaving no traces behind them.
Which all flashed through Drummond’s mind, as the cramp took and racked him, and the impulse to shout grew stronger and stronger. Twice he opened his mouth to hail the men he could see not three hundred yards away—to give a cry that would bring a boat post-haste to his rescue; twice he stopped himself with the shout unuttered. A more powerful force was at work within him than mere pain—a cold, bitter resolve to get even with Carl Peterson. And it required no great effort of brain to see that that would be more easily done if Peterson believed he had succeeded. Moreover if he shouted there would be questions asked. The police would inevitably come into the matter, demanding to know why he adopted such peculiar forms of amusement as going into twenty feet of water in a perfectly good motor-car. And all that would mean delay, which was the last thing he wanted. He felt tolerably certain, that, for all his apparent confidence, Peterson was not going to stop one minute longer in the country than was absolutely necessary.

So he stayed where he was, in silence—and gradually the cramp passed away. He could turn his head now, and with eyes that had grown accustomed to the darkness he saw what had happened. On each side of him the river flowed past smoothly, and he realised that by a wonderful stroke of luck he had struck a small shoal. Had he missed it—had he floated by on either side—well, Peterson’s plan would have succeeded.

“Following the extraordinary motor accident
ARRIVES AT MAYBRICK HALL 237

reported in our previous issue, we are now informed that the body of the unfortunate driver has been discovered some three miles from the scene of the tragedy. He was drowned, and had evidently been dead some hours.”

Drummond smiled grimly to himself as he imagined the paragraphs in the papers. His nerves were far too hardened to let his narrow escape worry him for an instant, and he felt an unholy satisfaction in thinking of Peterson searching the early specials and the late extras for that little item of news.

“I’d hate you to be disappointed, my friend,” he muttered to himself, “but you’ll have to be content with the coat and hat. The body has doubtless drifted farther on and will be recovered later.”

He took off his hat, and let it drift away; he unbuttoned his overcoat and sent it after the hat. Then letting himself down into the deep water, he swam noiselessly towards the bank;

A little to his surprise he found that his legs and arms felt perfectly normal—a trifle stiff perhaps, but beyond that the effects of the poison seemed to have worn off completely. Beyond being very wet he appeared to have suffered no evil results at all, and after he’d done “knees up” on the bank for five minutes to restore his circulation he sat down to consider his plan of action.

First, Phyllis at Maybrick Hall. He must get at her somehow, and, even if he couldn’t get her away, he must let her know that she would be all right. After that things must
look after themselves; everything would depend on circumstances. Always provided that those circumstances led to the one great goal—Peterson. Once Phyllis was safe, everything was subservient to that.

A church clock near by began to toll the hour, and Drummond counted the strokes. Eleven o'clock—not two hours since he had gone over the bridge—and it felt like six. So much the better; it gave him so many more hours of darkness, and he wanted darkness for his explorations at Maybrick Hall. And it suddenly dawned on him that he hadn't the faintest idea where the house was.

It might have deterred some men; it merely made Drummond laugh. If he didn't know, he'd find out—even if it became necessary to pull someone out of bed and ask. The first thing to do was to get back to the spot where the car had halted, and to do that he must go across country. Activity was diminishing on the bridge, but he could still see lanterns dancing about, and the sudden appearance of a very wet man might lead to awkward questions. So he struck off in the direction he judged to be right—moving with that strange, cat-like silence which was a never-ceasing source of wonderment even to those who knew him best.

No man ever heard Drummond coming, and very few ever saw him until it was too late, if he didn't intend that they should. And now, in utterly unknown country, with he knew not how many undesirable gentlemen about, he was taking no risks. Mercifully for
him it was a dark night—just such a night in fact as he would have chosen, and as he passed like a huge shadow from tree to tree, only to vanish silently behind a hedge, and reappear two hundred yards farther on, he began to feel that life was good. The joy of action was in his veins; he was going to get his hands on somebody soon, preferably the Italian or the man who called himself Franz. For Bill he had a sneaking regard; Bill at any rate could appreciate a good car when he saw one. The only trouble was that he was unarmed, and an unarmed man can’t afford to stop and admire the view in a mix up. Not that the point deterred him for a moment, it only made him doubly cautious. He must see without being seen; he must act without being heard. Afterwards would be a different matter.

Suddenly he stiffened and crouched motionless behind a bush. He had heard voices and the sound of footsteps crunching on the gravel.

“No good waiting any more,” said a man whom he recognised as Franz. “He’s dead for a certainty, and they can’t pull him out till to-morrow. Couldn’t have gone better. He swayed right over just as the car took the gates, and the bridge-keeper saw it. Think he fainted—"

Their voices died away in the distance, and Drummond came out from behind the bush. He stepped forward cautiously and found himself confronted with a high wire fence. Through it he could see a road along which the two men must have been walking. And then through a gap in the trees he saw a light in the
window of a house. So his first difficulty was solved. The man called Franz and his companion could have but one destination in all probability—Maybrick Hall. And that must be the house he could see through the trees, while the road on the other side of the fence was the drive leading up to it.

He gave them half a minute or so; then he climbed through the fence. It was a fence with horizontal strands of thick wire, about a foot apart, and the top strand was two feet above Drummond’s head. An expensive fence, he reflected; an unusual fence to put round any property of such a sort. An admirable fence for cattle in a corral because of its strength, but for a house and grounds—peculiar, to say the least. It was not a thing of beauty; it afforded no concealment, and it was perfectly simple to climb through. And because Drummond had been trained in the school which notices details, even apparently trivial ones, he stood for a moment or two staring at the fence, after he had clambered through. It was the expense of the thing more than anything else that puzzled him. It was new—that was obvious, and after a while, he proceeded to walk along it for a short way. And another peculiar thing struck him when he came to the first upright. It was an iron T-shaped post, and each strand of wire passed through a hole in the bottom part of the T. A perfectly simple and sound arrangement, and, but for one little point, just the type of upright one would have expected to find in such a fence. Round every hole was a small
white collar, through which each strand of wire passed, so that the wires rested on the collars, and not on the holes in the iron upright. Truly a most remarkable fence, he reflected again—in fact, a thoroughly eccentric fence. But he got no farther than that in his thoughts; the knowledge which would have supplied him with the one clue necessary to account for that fence’s eccentricity of appearance was not his. The facts he could notice; the reason for the facts was beyond him. And after a further examination he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. There were bigger things ahead of him than a mere question of fencing, and, keeping in the shadow of the shrubs which fringed each side of the drive, he crept silently towards the house.

It was a low, rambling type of building covered as far as he could see with ivy and creepers. There were only two stories, and Hugh nodded his satisfaction. It made things simpler when outside work was more than likely. For a long time he stood in the shadow of a big rhododendron bush, carefully surveying every possible line of approach and flight, and it was while he was balancing up chances that he gradually became aware of a peculiar noise proceeding from the house. It sounded like the very faint hum of an aeroplane in the far distance, except that every two or three seconds there came a slight thud. It was quite regular, and during the four or five minutes whilst he stood there listening there was no variation in the monotonous rhythm. Thud: thud: thud—faint, but very distinct;
and all the time the gentle whirring of some smooth-running, powerful engine.

The house was in darkness save for one room on the ground floor, from which the light was streaming. It was empty, and appeared to be an ordinary sitting-room. And, as a last resort, Hugh decided he would go in that way, if outside methods failed. But to start with he had no intention of entering the house; it struck him that the odds against him were unnecessarily large.

He retreated still farther into the shadow, and then quite clear and distinct the hoot of an owl was heard in the silent garden. He knew that Phyllis would recognise the call if she heard it; he knew that she would give him some sign if she could. And so he stood and waited, eagerly watching the house for any sign of movement. But none came, and after a pause of half a minute he hooted again. Of course it was possible that she was in a room facing the other way, and he had already planned his line of advance round to the back of the house. And then, just as he was preparing to skirt round and investigate he saw the curtains of one of the upper rooms shake and open slightly. Very faintly he repeated the call, and to his joy he saw a head poked through between them. But he was taking no chances, and it was impossible to tell to whom the head belonged. It might be Phyllis, and on the other hand it might not. So once again he repeated the call, barely above his breath, and then he waited for some answer.
ARRIVES AT MAYBRICK HALL

It came almost at once; his own name called very gently, and he hesitated no more. He was across the lawn in a flash and standing under her window, and once again he heard her voice tense with anxiety.

"Is that you, Hugh?"

"Yes, darling, it's me right enough," he whispered back. "But there's no time to talk now. I want you to jump on to the flower-bed. It's soft landing, and it won't hurt you."

"But I can't, old man," she said, with a little catch in her breath. "They've got me lashed up with a steel chain."

"They've got you lashed up with a steel chain," repeated Hugh stupidly. "The devil they have; the devil they have!"

And his voice was shaking a little with cold, concentrated fury.

"All right, kid," he went on after a moment; "if you can't come to me, I must come to you. We'll soon deal with that chain."

He glanced into the room underneath hers and saw that it looked like a drawing-room. The windows seemed easy to force if necessary, but he decided first of all to try the ivy outside. But it was useless for a man, of his weight. Just at the bottom it supported him, but as soon as he started to climb it gave way at once. Twice he got up about six feet, twice he fell back again as the ivy broke away from the wall. And after the second attempt he looked up at the anxious face of his wife above.

"No go, darling," he muttered. "And I'm
afraid of making too much noise. I’m going to try and force this window.”

By a stroke of luck they had not taken his clasp-knife, and by a still greater stroke of luck he found that the catch on the window had been broken, and that it proved even easier to open than he had thought. He stepped back and looked up.

“I’m coming in, kid,” he whispered. “Do you know where the stairs are?”

“Just about the middle of the house, old man. And listen. I can’t quite reach the door to open it, but I’ve got my parasol and I can tap on it so that you’ll know which it is.”

“Right,” he answered. “Keep your tail up.”

The next moment he had vanished into the drawing-room. And now he noticed that that strange noise which he had heard while standing on the lawn was much louder. As he cautiously opened the door and peered into the passage the very faint hum became a steady drone, while with each successive thud the floorboards shook a little.

The passage was in darkness, though light was shining from under some of the doors. And as he crept along in search of the stairs he heard voices proceeding from one of the rooms he passed. Evidently a fairly populous household, it struck him, as he tested the bottom stair with his weight to see if it creaked. But the staircase was old and solid, and the stair carpet was thick, and at the moment Hugh was not disposed to linger. Afterwards
the house seemed to promise a fairly fruitful field for investigation; at present Phyllis was all that mattered. So he vanished upwards with the uncanny certainty of all his movements at night, and a moment later he was standing on the landing above.

It was a long, straight corridor, a replica of the one below, and he turned in the direction in which he knew her room must lie. And he had only taken a couple of steps when he stopped abruptly, peering ahead with eyes that strove to pierce the darkness. For it seemed to him that there was something in the passage—something darker than its surroundings. He pressed against the wall absolutely motionless, and as he stood there with every sense alert, and his arms hanging loosely forward ready for any emergency, he heard a tapping on one of the doors just ahead of him. It was Phyllis signalling with her parasol as she had said, and he took a step forward. And at that moment something sprang out of the darkness, and he found himself fighting for his life.

For a second or two he was at a disadvantage, so completely had he been taken by surprise; then the old habits returned. And not a moment too soon; he was up against an antagonist who was worthy of him. Two hands like iron hooks were round his neck, and the man who gets that grip first wins more often than not. His own hands shot out into the darkness, and then for the first time in his life he felt a stab of fear. For he couldn’t reach the other man: long though
his arms were, the other man's were far longer, and as his hands went along them he could feel the muscles standing out like steel bars. He made one supreme effort to force through to his opponent's throat and it failed; with his superior reach he could keep his distance. Already Drummond's head was beginning to feel like bursting with the awful pressure round his throat, and he knew he must do something at once or lose. And just in time he remembered his clasp-knife. It went against his grain to use it; never before had he fought an unarmed man with a weapon—and as far as he could tell this man was unarmed. But it had to be done and done quickly.

With all his force he stabbed sideways at the man's left arm. He heard a snarl of pain, and the grip of one of the hands round his throat relaxed. And now the one urgent thing was to prevent him shouting for help. Like a flash Drummond was on him, one hand on his mouth and the other gripping his throat with the grip he had learned from Osaki the Jap in days gone by, and had never forgotten. And because he was fighting to kill now he wasted no time. The grip tightened; there was a dreadful worrying noise as the man bit into his thumb—then it was over. The man slipped downwards on to the floor, and Drummond stood drawing in great mouthfuls of air.

But he knew there was no time to lose. Though they had fought in silence, and he could still hear the monotonous thud and the beat of the engine, at any moment someone might
come upstairs. And to be found with a dead man at one’s feet in a strange house is not the best way of securing a hospitable welcome. What to do with the body—that was the first insistent point. There was no time for intricate schemes; it was a question of taking risks and chancing it. So for a moment or two he listened at the door of the room opposite that on which he had heard Phyllis tapping, and from which the man had sprung at him—then he gently opened it. It was a bedroom and empty, and without further hesitation he dragged his late opponent in, and left him lying on the floor. By the dim light from the uncurtained window, he could see that the man was almost deformed, so enormous was the length of his arms. They must have been six inches longer than those of an average man, and were almost as powerful as his own. And as he saw the snarling, ferocious face upturned to his, he uttered a little prayer of thanksgiving for the presence of his clasp-knife. It had been altogether too near a thing for his liking.

He closed the door and stepped across the passage, and the next moment Phyllis was in his arms.

"I thought you were never coming, old man," she whispered. "I was afraid the brutes had caught you."

"I had a slight difference of opinion with a warrior outside your door," said Hugh, grinning. "Quite like old times."

"But, my dear," she said, with a sudden anxiety in her voice, "you’re sopping wet."
"Much water has flowed under the bridge, my angel child, since I last saw you, and I've flowed with it." He kissed her on the right side of her mouth, then on the left for symmetry, and finally in the middle for luck. Then he grew serious. "No time for hot air now, old thing; let's have a look at this jolly old chain effect of yours. Once we're out of here, you shall tell me everything and I'll eat several pounds of mud for having been such an unmitigated idiot as to let these swine get hold of you."

He was examining the steel chain as he spoke, and gradually his face grew grave. He didn't seem to have gained much after all by breaking in; Phyllis was just as much a prisoner as ever. The chain, which was about six feet long, was fastened at one end to a big staple in the wall and at the other to a bracelet which encircled his wife's right wrist. And the bracelet could only be opened with a key. Any idea of breaking the chain or pulling out the staple was so preposterous as not to be worth even a moment's thought; so everything depended on the bracelet. And when he came to examine it more carefully he found that it had a Yale lock.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, and she watched him anxiously.
"Can't you get it undone, boy?" she whispered.
"Not if I stopped here till next Christmas, darling," he answered heavily.
"Well, get out of the window and go for the police," she implored.
“My dear,” he said still more heavily, “I had, as I told you, a little difference of opinion with the gentleman outside the door—and he’s very dead.” She caught her breath sharply. “A nasty man with long arms who attacked me. It might be all right, of course—but I somehow feel that this matter is beyond the local constable, even if I could find him. You see, I don’t even know where we are.” He checked the exclamation of surprise that rose to her lips. “I’ll explain after, darling; let’s think of this now. If only I could get the key; if only I knew where it was, even.”

“A foreigner came in about an hour ago,” answered his wife. “He had it then. And he said he’d come again to-night.”

“He did, did he?” said Hugh slowly. “I wonder if it’s my friend the Italian. Anyway, kid, it’s the only chance. Did he come alone last time?”

“Yes: I don’t think there was anyone with him. I’m sure there wasn’t.”

“Then we must chance it,” said Hugh. “Say something; get him into the room and then leave him to me. And if for any reason he doesn’t come I’ll have to leave you here and raise the gang.”

“Wouldn’t it be safer, boy, to do that now?” she said imploringly. “Suppose anything happened to you.”

“Anything further that happens to me tonight, old thing,” he remarked grimly, “will be as flat as a squashed pancake compared to what’s happened already.”
And then because she saw his mind was made up; and she knew the futility of arguing under those conditions, she sat on the bed beside him to wait. For a while they sat in silence listening to the monotonous thudding noise which went ceaselessly on; then because he wanted to distract her mind he made her tell him what had happened to her. And in disjointed whispers, with his arm round her waist, she pieced together the gaps in the story. How the man had come about the electric light, and then had offered to fetch her a taxi he knew already from Denny. She had got in, never suspecting anything, and told him to drive to the Ritz—and almost at once she had begun to feel faint. Still she suspected nothing, until she tried to open one of the windows. But it wouldn’t open, and the last thing she remembered before she actually fainted was tapping on the glass to try to draw the driver’s attention. Then when she came to, she found to her horror that she was not alone. A man was in the car with her, and they were out of London in the country. Both windows were wide open, and she asked him furiously what he was doing in her car. He smiled, and remarked that so far he was not aware he had sold it, but he was always open to an offer. And it was then that she realised for the first time exactly what had happened.

The man told her quite frankly that she hadn’t fainted at all, but had been rendered unconscious by a discharge of gas down the speaking-tube; that acting under orders he was taking her to a house in the country where
she would have to remain for how long he was unable to say, and further if she made a sound or gave any trouble he would gag her on the spot. Hugh’s arm tightened round her waist, and he cursed fluently under his breath.

“And what happened when you got here, darling?” he asked as she paused.

“They brought me straight up here, and tied me up,” she answered. “They haven’t hurt me—and they’ve given me food, but I’ve been terrified—simply terrified—as to what they were going to do next.” She clung to him, and he kissed her reassuringly. “There’s a man below with red hair and a straggling beard, who came and stared at me in the most horrible way. He was in his shirt sleeves and his arms were all covered with chemical stains.”

“Did he touch you?” asked Hugh grimly.

“No—he just looked horrible,” she said, with a shudder. “And then he repeated the other man’s threat—the one who had been in the car—that if I shouted or made any fuss he’d lash me up and gag me. He spoke in a sort of broken English—and his voice never seemed to rise above a whisper.”

She was trembling now, and Hugh made a mental note of another gentleman on whom he proposed to lay hands in the near future. Red hair and a straggling beard should not prove hard to recognise.

He glanced at the watch on Phyllis’s wrist, and saw that it was very nearly one o’clock. The noise of the engine was still going monotonously on; except for that the house seemed absolutely silent. And he began to wonder how long it
would be wise to continue the vigil. Supposing no one did come; supposing somebody came who hadn’t got the key; supposing two or three of them came at the same time. Would it be better, even now, to drop through the window—and try to find a telephone or the police? If only he knew where he was; it might take him hours to find either at that time of night. And his whole being revolted at the idea of leaving Phyllis absolutely defenceless in such a house.

He rose and paced softly up and down the room trying to think what was the best thing to do. It was a maddening circle whichever way he looked at it, and his fists clenched and unclenched as he tried to make up his mind. To go or to wait; to go at once or to stop in the hope that one man would come up and have the key on him. Common sense suggested the first course; something far more powerful than common sense prompted the latter. He could not and would not leave Phyllis alone. And so he decided on a compromise. If when daylight came no one had been up to the room, he would go; but he would wait until then. She’d feel safer once the night was over, and in the dawn he would be able to find his way outside more easily.

And he was just going to tell Phyllis what he had decided, when he heard a sound that killed the words on his lips. A door had opened below, and men’s voices came floating up the stairs.

“Lie down, darling,” he breathed in her ear, “and pretend to be asleep.”
ARRIVES AT MAYBRICK HALL 253

Without a word she did as he told her, while Hugh tiptoed over towards the door. There were steps coming up the stairs, and he flattened himself against the wall—waiting. The period of indecision was passed; unless he was very much mistaken the time of action had arrived. How it would pan out—whether luck would be in, or whether luck would fail was on the lap of the gods. All he could do was to hit hard and if necessary hit often, and a tingle of pure joy spread over him. Even Phyllis was almost forgotten at the moment; he had room in his mind for one thought only—the man whose steps he could hear coming along the passage.

There was only one of them, he noted with a sigh of relief—but for all that silence would be essential. It would take time to find the key; it would take even longer to get Phyllis free and out of the house. So there must be no risk of an alarm whatever happened.

The steps paused outside the door, and he heard a muttered ejaculation in Italian. It was his own particular friend of the motor right enough, and he grinned gently to himself. Apparently he was concerned over something, and it suddenly dawned on Drummond that it was the absence from duty of the long-handed bird that was causing the surprise. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten all about him, and for one awful second his heart stood still. Suppose the Italian discovered the body before he entered the room, then the game was up with a vengeance. Once the alarm was given he'd have to run the gauntlet of the whole crowd over ground he didn't know.
IN WHICH HUGH DRUMMOND

But his fears were groundless; the non-discovery of the watcher by the door took the Italian the other way. His first thought was to make sure that the girl was safe, and he flung open the door and came in. He gave a grunt of satisfaction as he saw her lying on the bed; then like a spitting cat he swung round as he felt Drummond’s hand on his shoulder.

"È pericoloso sporgersi," muttered Hugh pleasantly, recalling the only Italian words he knew.

"Dio mio!" stammered the other, with trembling lips. Like most southerners he was superstitious, and to be told that it was dangerous to lean out of the window by a man whom he knew to be drowned was too much for him. It was a ghost; it could be nothing else, and his knees suddenly felt strangely weak.

"You didn’t know I was a linguist, did you?" continued Hugh, still more pleasantly; and with every ounce of weight in his body behind the blow, he hit the Italian on the point of the jaw. Without a sound the man crumpled up and pitched on his face.

And now there was not a moment to be lost. At any moment one of his pals might come upstairs, and everything depended on speed and finding the key. Hugh shut the door and locked it; then feverishly he started to search through the Italian’s pockets. Everything up to date had panned out so wonderfully that he refused to believe that luck was going to fail him now, and sure enough he discovered the bunch in one of the unconscious man’s waistcoat pockets. There were four of them, and
the second he tried was the right one. Phyllis was free, and he heard her give a little sob of pure excitement.

"You perfectly wonderful boy!" she whispered, and Hugh grinned.

"We'll hurl floral decorations afterwards, my angel," he remarked. "Just at the moment it seems a pity not to replace you with someone."

He heaved the Italian on to the bed, and snapped the steel bracelet on to his arm. Then he slipped the keys into his own pocket, and crossed to the window. The engine was still humming gently; the thudding noise was still going on; nothing seemed in any way different. No light came from the room below them, everything had worked better than he had dared to hope. He had only to lower Phyllis out of the window, and let her drop on to the flower-bed and then follow himself. After that it was easy.

"Come along, darling," he said urgently, "I'm going to lower you out first—then I'll follow. And once we're down, you've got to trice up your skirts and run like a stag across the lawn till we're under cover of those bushes. We aren't quite out of the wood yet."

They were not indeed. It was just as Phyllis let go, and he saw her pick herself up and dart across the lawn, that he heard a terrific uproar in the house below, and several men came pounding up the stairs. There were excited voices in the passage outside, and for a moment he hesitated, wondering what on earth had caused the sudden alarm. Then realising that this was no time for guessing acrostics, he
vaulted over the window-sill himself, and lowered himself to the full extent of his arms. Then he too let go and dropped on to the flower bed below. And it was as he was picking himself up, preparatory to following Phyllis—whom he could see faintly across the lawn waiting for him, that he heard someone in the house shout an order in a hoarse voice.

"Switch on the power at once, you damned fool; switch it on at once!"