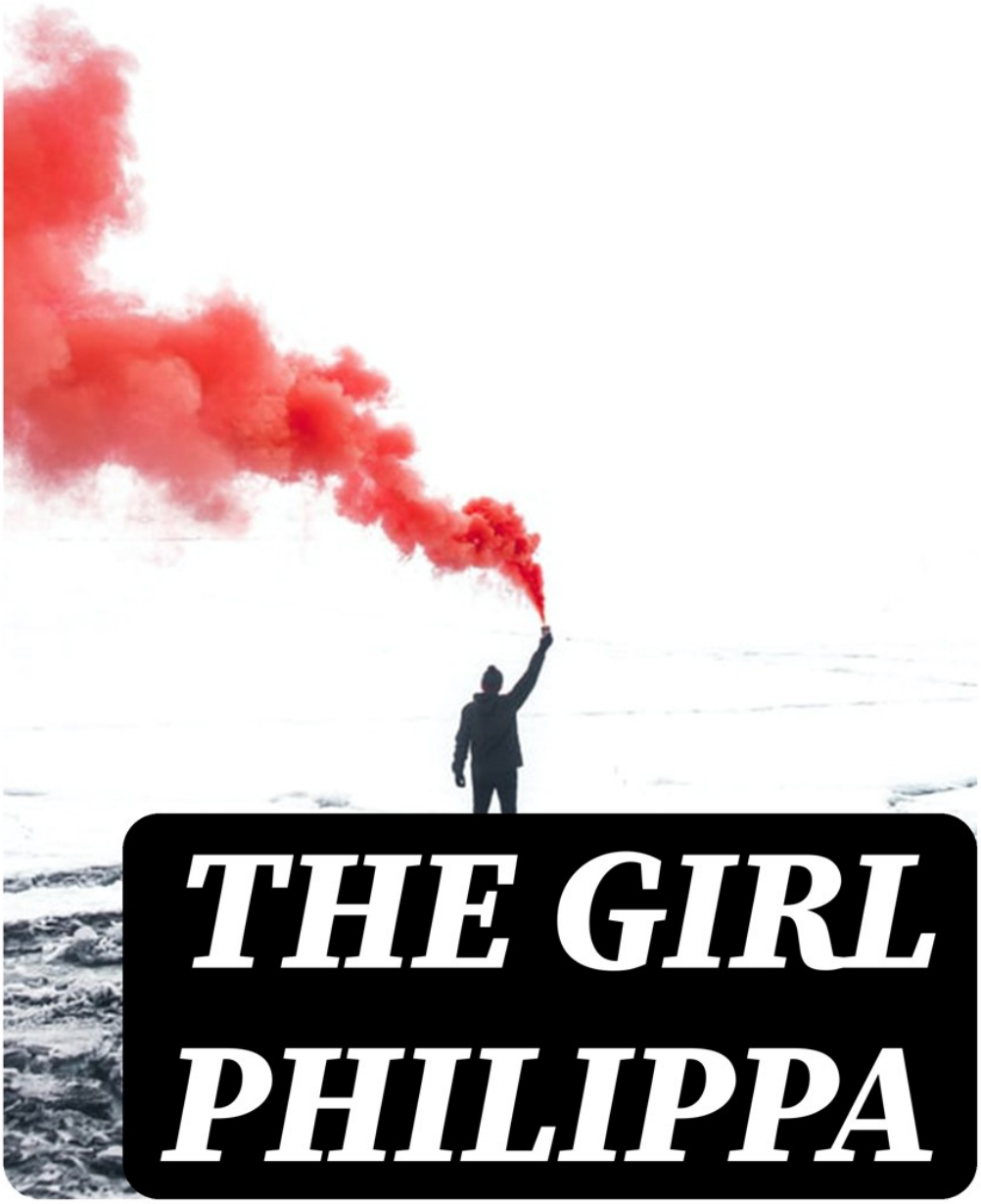
ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS

THE GIRL PHILIPPA

ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS



THE GIRL PHILIPPA

Robert W. Chambers

The Girl Philippa

EAN 8596547053187

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

"
You can tell a better tale than I;
Trap and wing you shoot a better score;
You can cast a surer, lighter fly,
Catch as can, you'd put me on the floor;
Should I hoist a sail beneath the sky
Yours the race, away and back to shore.
You have mastered all my woodland lore,
In the saddle you can give me spades;
You have slain your first and mighty boar
In the classic Croyden Forest shades;
You have heard the Northern rivers roar,
You have seen the Southern Everglades.
You have creeled your Highland yellow trout
Where the Scottish moorlands call us back;
You have left me puzzled and in doubt
Over tropic specimens I lack—
Sphinxes that I know not, huge and stout;
Butterflies, un-named, in blue and black.
Well, we've had a jolly run, my son,
Through a sunny world has lain our trail
Trodden side by side with rod and gun
Under azure skies where white clouds sail;
—Send our journey is not nearly done!
Send the light has not begun to fail.

Envoi

Yet, that day you tread the trail alone,
With no slower comrade to escort
On the path of spring with blossoms sown,
You may deem me not so bad a sort,

Smile and think, as one who would condone,
"He was sure a perfectly good sport."

R. W. C.
Broadalbin; 1916.

DOG-DAYS (1914)

The mad dog of Europe
Yelped in the dog-days' heat;
To his sick legs he staggered up
Swaying on twitching feet;
Snarled when he saw the offered cup,
And started down the street.
All hell has set his brain aflame;
All Europe shrieks with dread;
All mothers call on Mary's name,
Praying by shrine and bed,
"For Jesus' sake!"—Yet all the same
Each sees her son lie dead.
"On Guard!" the Western bugles blow;
"Boom!" from the Western main;
The Brabant flail has struck its blow;
The mad dog howls with pain
But lurches on, uncertain, slow,
Growling amid his slain.
They beat and kick his dusty hide,
He bleeds from every vein;
On his red trail the Cossacks ride
Across the reeking plain

While gun-shots rip his bloody sides
From Courland to Champagne.
Under the weary moons and suns
With phantom eyes aglow,
Dog-trotting still the spectre runs
Yelping at every blow
'Til through its ribs the flashing guns
And stars begin to show.
The moon shines through its riven wrack;
On the bleached skull the suns
Have baked the crusted blood all black,
But still the spectre runs,
Jogging along its hell-ward track
Lined with the tombs of Huns.
Back to the grave from whence it came
To foul the world with red;
Back to its bed of ancient shame
In the Hunnish tomb it fled
Where God's own name is but a name
And souls that lived lie dead.

THE GIRL PHILIPPA

FOREWORD

On the twenty-eighth of June, 1914, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, was murdered by a

Serb in Serajevo, the capital of Bosnia. The murder was the most momentous crime ever committed in the world, for it altered the geography and the political and social history of that planet, and changed the entire face of the civilized and uncivilized globe. Generations unborn were to feel the consequences of that murder.

Incidentally, it vitally affected the life and career of the girl Philippa.

Before the press of the United States received the news, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the British Ambassador, had been notified of the tragedy, and a few minutes later he was in secret conference with the President.

The British Ambassador knew what he wanted, which was more than the administration knew, and at this hasty and secret conference he bluntly informed the President that, in his opinion, war before midsummer had now become inevitable; that there was every probability of England being drawn into a world-wide conflict; and that, therefore, an immediate decision was necessary concerning certain pending negotiations.

The truth of this became apparent to the President. The State Department's ominous information concerning a certain Asiatic Empire, the amazing knowledge in regard to the secret military and political activities of Germany in the United States, the crass stupidity of a Congress which was no better than an uneducated nation deserved, the intellectual tatterdemalions in whose care certain vitally important departments had been confided—a momentary vision of what all this might signify flickered fitfully in the presidential brain.

And, before Sir Cecil left, it was understood that certain secret negotiations should be immediately resumed and concluded as soon as possible—among other matters the question of the Harkness shell.

About the middle of July the two governments had arrived at an understanding concerning the Harkness shell. The basis of this transaction involved the following principles, proposed and mutually accepted:

1st. The Government of the United States agreed to disclose to the British Government, and to no other government, the secret of the Harkness shell, known to ordnance experts as "the candle shell."

2nd. The British Government agreed to disclose to the United States Government, and to no other government, the secrets of its new submarine seaplane, known as "the flying fish," the inventor of which was one Pillsbury, a Yankee, who had offered it in vain to his own country before selling it to England.

3rd. Both Governments solemnly engaged not to employ either of these devices against each other in the event of war.

4th. The British Government further pledged itself to restrain from violence a certain warlike and Asiatic nation until the Government of the United States could discover some method of placating that nation.

But other and even more important negotiations, based upon the principle that the United States should insure its people and its wealth by maintaining an army and a navy commensurate with its population, its importance, and its international obligations, fell through owing to presidential

indifference, congressional ignorance, the historic imbecility of a political party, and the smug vanity of a vast and half-educated nation, among whose employees were numbered several of the most perfect demagogues that the purlieus of politics had ever germinated.

This, then, was the condition of affairs in the United States when, on the nineteenth of July, the British Ambassador was informed that through the treachery of certain employees the plans and formula for the Harkness shell had been abstracted.

But the British Embassy had learned of this catastrophe through certain occult channels even before it was reported to the United States Government; and five hours after the information had reached Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, two young men stepped aboard the Antwerp liner *Zeeduyne* a few seconds before the gangway was pulled up.

With the first turn of the steamer's screws the wheel of fate also began to revolve, spinning out the web of destiny so swiftly that already its meshes had fallen over an obscure little town thousands of miles distant, and its net already held a victim so obscure that few except the French Government had ever heard of the girl Philippa.

The two young men who had come aboard at the last moment were nice-looking young men. They carried tennis bats, among other frivolous hand luggage, and it was rumored very quickly on board that they were two celebrated New Zealand tennis champions on their way to the international tournament at Ostend.

It was the Captain who first seemed interested in the rumor and who appeared to know all about the famous New

Zealand players, Halkett and Gray.

And this was odd, because when Halkett and Gray came aboard their names did not figure on the passenger list, no stateroom had been engaged for them, and the Captain of the *Zeeduyne* had never before laid eyes on either of them.

But he may have heard of them, for that morning the British Embassy had called him on the telephone, had talked for twenty minutes to him, and had arranged for him to hold his steamer if necessary. But it had been necessary for the Captain to hold the *Zeeduyne* for ten minutes only.

The voyage of the *Zeeduyne* was calm, agreeable, and superficially uneventful. There was much dancing aboard. Halkett and Gray danced well. They had come aboard knowing nobody; in a day or two they seemed to have met everybody. Which urbanity is not at all characteristic of Englishmen. New Zealanders, it seemed, were quite different.

The ocean being on its best behavior nearly everybody appeared triumphantly on deck. There were, however, several passengers who maintained exclusiveness in their staterooms; and among these were two German gentlemen who preferred the stateroom they shared in common. However, they took the air sometimes, and always rather late at night.

Evidently they were commercial gentlemen, for they sent several wireless messages to Cologne during the voyage, using a code of their own which seemed to concern perfumes and cosmetics and, in particular, a toilet soap known as Calypso soap.

In return they received several wireless messages, also apparently in some commercial code, and all mentioning perfumes and Calypso soap.

And a copy of every code message which they dispatched or received was sent to the Captain of the *Zeeduyne*, and that affable and weather-reddened Belgian always handed these copies to the tennis champions of New Zealand, who spent considerable time poring over them in the only spot on the steamer which was absolutely safe from intrusion—the Captain's private quarters.

Then, in their turn, as the steamer drew nearer to the Belgian coast, they sent a number of wireless messages in private code. Some of these messages were directed to the British Consul at Maastricht, some to the British Ambassador at Brussels, some to private individuals in Antwerp.

But these details did not interfere with the young men's social activities on board, or with their popularity. Wherever Halkett and Gray walked, they walked surrounded by maidens and pursued by approving glances of relatives and parents.

But the two German gentlemen who kept their cabin by day and prowled sometimes by night were like Mr. Kipling's cat; when they walked they walked by their wild lone. Only the chaste moon was supposed to notice them. But always either Halkett or Gray was watching them, sometimes dressed in the jaunty uniform of a deck steward, or in the clothing of a common sailor, or in the gorgeous raiment of a ship's officer. The two Germans never noticed them as they walked in the dark by their wild lone.

And always while one of the young men watched on deck, the other ransacked the stateroom and luggage of the gentlemen from Germany—but ransacked in vain.

As the *Zeeduyne* steamed into the Scheldt, several thousand miles away, in the city of Washington, the French Ambassador telegraphed in cipher to his Government that the secret plans and formula for the Harkness shell, which had been acquired by England from the United States Government, had been stolen on the eve of delivery to the British Ambassador; that French secret agents were to inspect the arrival of all Dutch, Belgian, and German steamers; that all agents in the French service resident or stationed near the north or northeastern frontier of France were to watch the arrival of all strangers from Holland or Belgium, and, if possible, follow and observe any individual who might be likely to have been involved in such a robbery.

Immediately, from the Military Intelligence Department in Paris orders were telegraphed and letters sent to thousands of individuals of every description and station in life, to be on the alert.

Among others who received such letters was a denationalized individual named Wildresse, who kept a cabaret in the little town of Ausone.

The cabaret was called the Café de Biribi. Wildresse insisted that the name had been his own choice. But it was at the request of the Government that his cabaret bore the ominous title as an ever-present reminder to Wildresse that his personal liberty and the liberty of his worthless son and heir depended on his good behavior and his alacrity in

furnishing the French Government with whatever information it demanded.

The letter sent to Monsieur Wildresse read as follows:

MONSIEUR:

Undescribed individuals carrying important document stolen from the United States Government may appear in your vicinity.

Observe diligently, but with discretion, the arrival of any strangers at your café. If suspicions warrant, lay a complaint before local police authorities. Use every caution. The fugitives probably are German, but may be American. Inform the girl Philippa of what is required. And remember that Biribi is preferable to Noumea.

When Wildresse received this letter he went into the bedroom of the girl Philippa, who was standing before her looking glass busily rouging her cheeks and painting her lips. She wore no corset, her immature figure requiring none.

"If they come our way, Philippa," growled Wildresse, "play the baby—do you hear? Eyes wide and artless, virginal candor alternating with indifference. In other words, be yourself."

"That is not difficult," said the girl Philippa, powdering her nose. "When I lose my innocence then it will mean real acting."

Wildresse glared at her out of his little black eyes.

"*When* you lose it, eh?" he repeated. "Well, when you do, I'll break your neck. Do you understand that?"

The girl continued to powder her nose.

"Who would marry me?" she remarked indifferently. "Also, now it is too late for me to become a religieuse like—"

"You'll carry on the business!" he growled. "That's what you'll do—with Jacques, when the Sbirs de Biribi let him loose. As for marrying, you can think it over when you are thirty. You'll have a dot by that time, if the damned Government lets me alone. And a woman with a dot need not worry about marriage."

The girl was now busy with her beautiful chestnut hair; Wildresse's pock-marked features softened.

"*Allons*," he said in his harsh voice, "lilies grow prettiest on dunghills. Also, you are like me—serious, not silly. I have no fears. Besides, you are where I have my eye on you."

"If I am what I am it is because I prefer it, not on account of your eye," she said listlessly.

"Is that so!" he roared. "All the same, continue to prefer virtue and good conduct, and I'll continue to use my two eyes, nom de Dieu! And if any strangers who look like Germans come into the café—any strangers at all, no matter what they look like—keep your eyes on them, do you hear?"

"I hear," said the girl Philippa.

The web of fate had settled over her at last.

About that time the steamer *Zeeduyne* was docking at Antwerp.

Two hours later two German gentlemen in a hurry registered at the Hôtel St. Antoine in the Place Verte, and were informed that they were expected immediately in room 23.

A page conducted them to the corridor and indicated the room; they thanked him and sent him back for their luggage which he had, it seemed, neglected to bring from the lobby.

Then both German gentlemen went to the door of room 23, knocked, and were admitted; and the door was rather violently closed and locked.

The next instant there came a crash, a heavy fall, dull sounds of feet scuffling behind the locked door, a series of jarring, creaking noises, then silence.

A chambermaid came into the corridor to listen, but the silence was profound, and presently she went away.

When the boy came back with the hand luggage and knocked at 23, Halkett opened the door a little way and, tipping the lad with a five-franc piece, bade him leave the luggage outside the door for the present.

Later, Gray cautiously opened the door and drew in the luggage.

Ten minutes later both young men came leisurely out of the room, locking the door on the outside. They each carried hand luggage. Halkett lighted a cigarette.

At the desk Gray requested that the gentlemen in No. 23 should not be disturbed that night, as they were lying down and in need of repose. Which was true.

Then both young men departed in a cab. At the railroad station, however, an unusually generous stranger offered Gray a motor cycle for nothing. So he strapped his bag to it, nodded a smiling adieu to Halkett, and departed.

Halkett bought a ticket to Maastricht, Holland, which he had no idea of using, and presently came out of the station and walked eastward rather rapidly. A man who also had

bought a ticket for Maastricht rose from his seat in the waiting room and walked stealthily after him, making a signal to another man.

This second man immediately stepped into a station telephone booth and called up room 23 at the Hôtel St. Antoine, where two German gentlemen, badly battered, were now conferring with a third German gentleman who had paid no attention to instructions from the hotel office but had gone to room 23, knocked until out of patience, and had then summoned the *maître d'hôtel*, who unlocked the door with a master-key.

Which operation revealed two Teutons flat on their backs, very carefully tied up with rope and artistically gagged.

This unbattered gentleman now conversed over the telephone with the man at the railroad station.

A few moments later he and the two battered ones left the hotel hastily in a taxicab, joined the man at the railroad station, and drove rapidly eastward.

And before forty-eight hours had elapsed, each one of these four men operating in pairs, had attempted to kill the young man named Halkett. Twice he got away. The third time two of them succeeded in locating him in the little town of Diekirch, a town which Halkett was becoming more and more anxious to leave, as he finally began to realize what a hornet's nest he and his friend Gray had succeeded in stirring up.

And all the while the invisible net of destiny in which he now found himself entangled was every minute enmeshing in its widening spread new people whose fate was to be

linked with his, and who had never even heard of him. Among them was the girl Philippa.

PROLOGUE

A narrow-gauge railroad track runs through the woods from Diekirch, connecting the two main lines; and on the deserted wooden platform beside this track stood Halkett, his suitcase in one hand, the other hand in his side pocket, awaiting the shuttle train with an impatience born of deepest anxiety.

The young man's anxiety was presently justified, for, as he sauntered to and fro, uneasily scanning the track and the unbroken woods around him, always keeping his right hand in his coat pocket, two men crept out from behind separate trees in the forest directly behind the platform, and he turned around only in time to obtain a foreshortened and disquieting view of the muzzle of a revolver.

"Hands up—" began the man behind the weapon; but as he was in the very act of saying it, a jet of ammonia entered his mouth through the second button of Halkett's waistcoat, and he reeled backward off the platform, his revolver exploding toward the sky, and fell into the grass, jerking and kicking about like an unhealthy cat in a spasm.

Already Halkett and the other man had clinched; the former raining blows on the latter's Teutonic countenance, which proceeding so dazed, diverted, and bewildered him

that he could not seem to find the revolver bulging in his side pocket.

It was an automatic, and Halkett finally got hold of it and hurled it into the woods.

Then he continued the terrible beating which he was administering.

"Get out!" he said in German to the battered man, still battering him. "Get out, or I'll kill you!"

He hit him another cracking blow, turned and wrested the other pistol from the writhing man on the grass, whirled around, and went at the battered one again.

"I've had enough of this!" he breathed, heavily. "I tell you I'll kill you if you bother me again! I could do it now—but it's too much like murder if you're not in uniform!"

The man on the grass had managed to evade suffocation; he got up now and staggered off toward the woods, and Halkett drove his companion after him at the point of his own revolver.

"Keep clear of me!" he said. "If you do any more telephoning or telegraphing it will end in murder. I've had just about enough, and if any more of your friends continue to push this matter after I enter France, just as surely as I warn you now, I'll defend my own life by taking theirs. You can telephone that to them if you want to!"

As he stood on the edge of the wooden platform, revolver lifted, facing the woods where his two assailants had already disappeared, the toy-like whistle of an approaching train broke the hot, July stillness.

Before it stopped, he hurled the remaining revolver into the woods across the track, then, as the train drew up and a

guard descended to open a compartment door for him, he cast a last keen glance at the forest behind him.

Nothing stirred there, not even a leaf.

But before the train had been under way five minutes a bullet shattered the glass of the window beside which he had been seated; and he spent the remainder of the journey flat on his back smoking cigarettes and wondering whether he was going to win through to the French frontier, to Paris, to Calais, to London, or whether they'd get him at last and, what was of infinitely greater importance, a long, thin envelope which he carried stitched inside his undershirt.

That was really what mattered, not what might become of a stray Englishman. He knew it; he realized it without any illusion whatever. It was the contents of this envelope that mattered, not his life.

Yet, so far, he had managed to avoid taking life in defense of his envelope. In fact, he traveled unarmed. Now, if matters continued during his journey through France as they had begun and continued while he was crossing Holland and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, he would be obliged to take life or lose his own.

And yet, if he did kill somebody, that meant arrest and investigation by the police of France. And such an investigation might be fatal to the success of his undertaking—quite as fatal, in fact, as though he himself were killed.

The main thing was to get that envelope and its contents to London.

His instructions were not to mail it, but to take it in person, or to send it, if necessary, by another messenger

through other channels.

One thing became more and more evident to him; the time had now arrived when certain people unknown to him by sight had decided to kill him as the only way out of the affair.

Would they actually go so far as to kill him in France, with the chance of the French police seizing that envelope before they could seize it and clear out with it to Berlin? Would they hazard the risk of France obtaining cognizance of a matter which so vitally concerned Germany, rather than permit that information to reach England?

Halkett lay on his back and smoked and did not know.

But he was slowly coming to the conclusion that one thing was now imperative: the envelope must not be found upon his person if he were killed.

But what on earth to do with it until it could be safely transferred to the proper person he had not the slightest idea.

That evening, as he changed trains at the frontier, in the lamp-lit dimness of the station platform he was fired at twice, and not hit.

A loud outcry naturally ensued; a stampede of passengers who tried to escape, a rush of others who desired to see what had happened—much hubbub and confusion, much shouting in several languages.

But nobody could be found who had fired two shots from a revolver, and nobody admitted that they had been shot at.

And so, as nobody had been hit, the gendarmes, guards, and railway officials were in a quandary.

And the train rolled out of the station with Halkett aboard, a prey to deepest anxiety concerning his long thin envelope.

CHAPTER I

Somebody at Warner's elbow spoke to him in French. He turned his head leisurely: a well-dressed young fellow, evidently an Englishman, was striving to maintain a place beside him in the noisy, market day crowd.

"Pardon, Monsieur, are you English?"

"American," replied Warner briefly, and without enthusiasm.

"My name is Halkett," said the other, with a quick smile. "I'm English, and I'm in trouble. Could you spare me a moment?"

To Warner the man did not look the typical British dead-beat, nor had he any of the earmarks and mannerisms of the Continental beach-comber. Yet he was, probably, some species or other of that wearisome and itinerant genus.

"I'm listening," said the young American resignedly. "Continue your story."

"There's such a row going on here—couldn't we find a quieter place?"

"I can hear you perfectly well, I tell you!"

Halkett said:

"If I try to talk to you here I'll be overheard, and that won't do. I'm very sorry to inconvenience you, but really I'm in a fix. What a noise these people are making! Do you mind coming somewhere else?"

"Say what you desire to say here," returned Warner bluntly. "And perhaps it might save time if you begin with the last chapter; I think I can guess the rest of the story."

The features of the American expressed boredom to the point of unfriendly indifference. The Englishman looked at him, perplexed for a moment, then his sun-bronzed face lighted up with another quick smile.

"You're quite mistaken," he said. "I don't expect the classic remittance from England, and I don't require the celebrated twenty-franc loan until it arrives. You take me for that sort, I see, but I'm not. I don't need money. May I tell you what I do need—rather desperately?"

"Yes, if you choose."

"I need a friend."

"Money is easier to pick up," remarked Warner drily.

"I know that. May I ask my favor of you all the same?"

"Go ahead."

"Thanks, I will. But can't we get out of this crowd? What is going on in this town anyway?"

"Market day. It's like this once a month in Ausone. Otherwise the town is as dead as any other French provincial town."

Shoulder to shoulder they threaded their way through the crowded market square, amid the clatter of sabots, the lowing of cattle, the incessant bleating of sheep. Ducks quacked from crates in wagons, geese craned white necks

and hissed above the heads of the moving throngs; hogs squealed and grunted; fowls hanging by their legs from the red fists of sturdy peasant women squawked and flapped.

Cheap-Jack shows of all sorts encumbered the square and adjacent streets and alleys—gingerbread booths, shooting ranges, photograph galleries, moving-picture shows, theaters for ten sous. Through the lowing, bleating, and cockcrowing, the drumming and squeaking of Punch and Judy, and the brassy dissonance of half a dozen bands, mournful and incessant strains from several merry-go-rounds continued audible.

But the steady clatter of sabots on stony pavements, and the ceaseless undertone of voices, swelling, subsiding, dominated the uproar, softening the complaint of kine and feathered fowl to a softly cheerful harmony suggestive of summer breezes and green fields.

On the dusty Boulevard d'Athos—the typical solitary promenade of such provincial towns—there were, as usual, very few people—the inevitable nurses here and there, wheeling prams; a discouraged, red-trousered and sou-less soldier or two sprawling on benches under the chestnut trees; rarely a passing pedestrian, more often a prowling dog.

At the head of the Boulevard d'Athos, where the rue d'Auros crosses, Warner halted under the shade of the chestnuts, for the July sun was very hot. His unconvinced grey eyes now rested inquiringly on the young Englishman who had called himself Halkett. He said:

"What species of trouble are you in?"

Halkett shook his head.

"I can't tell you what the trouble is; I may only ask you to help me a bit—" The quick smile characteristic of him glimmered in his eyes again—a winning smile, hinting of latent recklessness. "I have my nerve with me, you see—as you Americans have it," he added. "You're thinking something of that sort, I fancy."

Warner smiled too, rather faintly, but remained silent.

"This is what I want you to do," continued Halkett. "I've a long thin envelope in my pocket. I'd like to have you take it from me and slip it into your breast pocket and then button your coat. Is that too much to ask?"

"*What!*"

"That's all I want you to do. Then if you wouldn't mind giving me your name and address? And that is really all I ask."

Said the American, amused and surprised:

"That airy request of yours requires a trifle more explanation than you seem inclined to offer."

"I know it does. I can't offer it. Only—you won't get into trouble if you keep that envelope buttoned tightly under your coat until I come for it again."

"But I'm not going to do that!"

"Why?"

"Why the devil should I? I don't propose to wander about France carrying papers concerning which I know nothing—to oblige a young man about whom I know even less."

"I quite see that," admitted Halkett seriously. "I shouldn't feel inclined to do such a thing either."

"Can't you tell me what is the nature of these papers?—Or something—some explanation——"

"I'm sorry."

"And why do you propose to trust me with them?" continued Warner, curiously. "How do you know I am honest? How do you know I won't examine your packet as soon as you clear out?"

Halkett looked up with his quick and winning smile:

"I'll take that risk."

"Why? You don't know me."

"I had a good look at you in the market square before I spoke to you."

"Oh. You think you are a psychologist?"

"Of sorts. It's a part of my business in life."

"Suppose," said Warner, smiling, "you explain a little more clearly to me exactly what is your actual business in life."

"Very glad to. I write."

"Books?"

"No; just—stories."

"Fiction?"

"As one might say, facts rather than fiction."

"You are a realist?" suggested Warner with slight irony.

"I try to be. But do you know, there is more romance in realism than in fairy tales?"

Warner, considerably diverted, nodded:

"I know. You belong to the modern school, I take it."

"Very modern. So modern, in fact, that my work concerns tomorrow rather than today."

Warner nodded again:

"I see. You are a futurist—opportunist. There are a lot of clever men working on those lines in England.... Still—" he

glanced amusedly at Halkett "—that scarcely explains your rather unusual request. Why should I take charge of an envelope for *you*?"

"My dear fellow, I can't answer that.... Still—I may say this much; I'm hard put to it—rather bewildered—had a rotten time of it in the Grand Duchy and in Belgium—so to speak—"

"What do you mean by a rotten time?"

"Rows."

"I don't understand. You'll have to be more explicit."

"Well—it had to do with this envelope I carry. Some chaps of sorts wanted to get it away from me. Do you see? ... I had a lively time, and I rather expect to have another before I get home—if I ever get there."

Warner looked at him out of clear, sophisticated eyes:

"See here, my ingenuous British friend," he said, "play square with me, if you play at all."

"I shan't play otherwise."

"Very well, then; why are you afraid to carry that envelope?"

"Because," said Halkett, coolly, "if I'm knocked on the head and that envelope is found in my clothing and is stolen, the loss of my life would be the lesser loss to my friends."

"Is anybody trying to *kill* you?"

Halkett shrugged his shoulders; but there seemed to be neither swagger nor bravado in his careless gesture of assent. He said:

"Listen; here's my case in brief. I saw you in the crowd yonder, and I made up my mind concerning you. I have to

think quickly sometimes; I took a good look at you and—" He waved one hand. "You look like a soldier. I don't know whether you are or not. But I am ready to trust you. That's all."

"Do you mean to say that you are in any real personal danger?"

"Yes. But that doesn't count. I can look out for myself. What worries me is this envelope. Couldn't you take charge of it? I'd be very grateful."

"How long do you expect me to carry it about?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether anything is likely to happen to me today in this town—or tomorrow on the train—or in Paris—I have no means of knowing. I merely want to get to Paris, if I can, and send a friend back here for that envelope."

"I thought you were to return for it yourself."

"Maybe. Maybe I'll send you a letter by a friend—just a line for him to give you, saying it's all right."

"Mr. Halkett, you have rather a disconcerting way of expressing unlimited confidence in me—"

"Yes, I trust you."

"But *why*?"

"You look right."

"That's no reason!"

"My dear chap, I'm in a corner, and instinct rules, not reason! You see, I—I'm rather afraid they may get me before I can clear out."

"*Who'll* get you?" demanded Warner impatiently.

"That's the worst of it; I don't know these fellows by sight. The same chaps never try it on twice."

Warner said quietly:

"What is this very dramatic mess you're in? Can't you give me a hint?"

"I'm sorry."

"Shall I give *you* a hint?"

"If you like."

"Are the *police* after you?"

"No."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure. I don't blame you for asking. It looks that way. But it isn't."

"But you are being followed across Europe by people who want this envelope of yours?"

"Oh, yes."

"You expect personal violence from them?"

Halkett nodded and gazed absently down the almost deserted boulevard.

"Then why don't you appeal to the police—if your conscience is clear?" demanded Warner bluntly.

Halkett's quick smile broke out.

"My dear chap," he said, "I'd do so if I were in England. I can't, as matters stand. The French police are no use to me."

"Why don't you go to your consulate?"

"I did. The Consul is away on his vacation. And I didn't like the looks of the vice-consul."

"What?"

"No. I didn't like his name, either."

"What do you mean?"

"His name is Schmidt. I—didn't care for it."

Warner laughed, and Halkett looked up quickly, smiling.

"I'm queer. I admit it. But you ought to have come to some conclusion concerning me by this time. Do you think me a rotter, or a criminal, or a lunatic, or a fugitive from justice? Or will you chance it that I'm all right, and will you stand by me?"

Warner laughed again:

"I'll take a chance on you," he said. "Give me your envelope, you amazing Britisher!"