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The Gates of Doom

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338095398

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Chapter 1. THE PLAYERS

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The room—somewhat disordered now, at the end of that long night's play—was spacious, lofty and handsomely equipped. On a boldly carved, walnut side table of Dutch origin there was a disarray of glasses, bottles, plates and broken meats. From a mahogany wine cooler beneath this table's arched legs sprouted the corkless necks of a half-score empty bottles. About the card-table in the room's middle stood irregularly some eight or ten chairs, lately occupied by the now departed players. One overturned chair lay neglected where it had fallen. Cards were still strewn upon the table's cover of green baize and some few lay scattered on the scarlet Turkey rug that covered a square of the blocked and polished floor.

Overhead in the heavy chandelier of ormolu and crystal the candles were guttering, caught by the draught from one of the long French windows which his lordship had just opened. In the gap he stood, gazing out into the chill grey dawn and the wraiths of mist that hung above the park.

By the carved overmantel, his shoulders to the shelf and the ormolu timepiece, which marked now the hour of three, stood Lord Pauncefort's only lingering and most important guest. He was a man of rather more than middle height, slender as a rapier is slender, of a steely, supple strength. He was simply yet very elegantly dressed in black, relieved only by the silver embroidery on his stockings, the paste buckles that flashed from his lacquered, red-heeled shoes, and the lace at his throat, among which a great sapphire

glowed with sombre fire. Enough remained, however, in his erect carriage, his Steinkirk, the clubbing of his hair and the bronze of his face to advertise the soldier.

His keen blue eyes were upon the figure of his host, and in them was reflected the faint smile that softened the somewhat hard lines of his mouth. Yet the smile was scornful—of his host and of the night that was sped; scornful and something sad.

Was it, he mused, upon such as these that his king and master relied in his dire need? Was it to gain such support as my lord Pauncefort and his precious friends could offer to that desperate cause that he, himself, had ventured once more into England where a thousand guineas was offered for his head?

The play, he reflected contemptuously, they had urged as a wise measure of precaution: let them do their plotting about a faro-table, had been their plea; thus they should pass for a parcel of idle gamesters, and none could dream that the game was a pretence, a mere mask upon their real business. Thus had they deluded themselves, but not him. He had seen, and soon, that the plotting was the pretence, and play the business. And what play! A gamester all his life, a man who had beggared himself a score of times in twenty different lands, never had he known such stakes as those which had been laid that night, never had he seen such sums change hands across the green baize of a card table.

He checked the contemptuous current of his thoughts to reflect that he himself had plunged as headlong as the most reckless of them into the game that was afoot. Had he not

won a fortune 'twixt the commencement and the abandoning of that monstrous play? His winnings amounted to something over ten thousand guineas, and at no one time in his vagrant, adventurous life had he been master of half that sum. Yet it did not follow that he was quite as they. If he had risked that night certain moneys that he scarce dared call his own, so did he hesitate to call his own the vast sum which he had won.

Ten thousand guineas! Ten times the value set by the Government upon his own poor head, he reflected whimsically.

And then Lord Pauncefort turned from the window and the sight of his lordship's livid, distorted countenance drove all other considerations from his guest's mind, brought a sudden cry of concern from his lips.

"My lord, are you ill?"

His lordship made a gesture of denial. "It—it is not that," he said, and his voice was husky with emotion. He was a man of some thirty years of age, of a swarthy male beauty that was almost arresting. His large eyes were dark and liquid, his mouth delicately limned, his nose intrepidly arched, with fine sensitive nostrils. But the brow was alarmingly shallow and there was a cleft in the square—the too square—chin. He stood now, dabbing his moist brow with a flimsy kerchief that was not whiter than the hand that held it.

"Captain Gaynor," he explained abruptly, almost fiercely, "I am a broken man. I have ruined myself this night."

There was scarce one of the departed guests, Captain Gaynor bethought him, who had not left that house a

winner, and in all his lordship's losses must amount to almost twice the sum of the Captain's winnings.

None the less, his lordship's outcry jarred upon the Captain's nice sensibilities. Such an admission made to one who was a heavy winner—and that one none so intimately admitted to his lordship's private confidences, when all was said—seemed to Captain Gaynor an outrage on decorum. He held that the man who cannot lose with calm and grace, no matter what the game or what the stakes—even though it should be life itself—has not the right to enter into play. And this was no abstract creed. It was the one by which the Captain lived.

The sight of the stricken man before him moved him to no pity.

Rather it inspired in him a contempt that amounted almost to physical ill being, to disgust. His immediate impulse was to take his leave. If, indeed, he had lingered at all after the departure of his fellow-guests, it had been in the hope that my Lord Pauncefort might yet have something for his private ear concerning the real business that had brought him to England and to that house. And perceiving now how idle had been this hope, observing his host's suddenly altered condition, Captain Gaynor's inclination was to depart.

But he reflected that to depart abruptly after that confession might be to offend. On his own account this would have troubled the Captain not at all. But for the Cause's sake, and for the sake of the service it might be Pauncefort's to render to that Cause, he did not wish to give offence to his host if it might be avoided. He was in a

quandary, and vexed thereby; for quandaries were not usual in the life of this man who lived by swift decisions and swift action.

He shifted uneasily where he stood, and his face assumed a mask of polite concern. His lordship had sunk into the nearest chair, like a man wearied to exhaustion. There was a wildness in his eyes, and he continued nervously to dab his brow—that brow whose shallowness belied the general nobility of his countenance.

"You think, maybe, that I exaggerate," he resumed presently. "But I tell you, sir, that I have played the knave this night. I have lost four thousand guineas to Martindale, another two to Bagshot, and I have lost my honour too, for I have forfeited all chance of ever being able to pay those losses."

The concern in the Captain's face appeared to deepen.

"They are your friends," he said slowly. "Surely they will be glad to wait upon your convenience." In his own breast pocket rested his lordship's draft upon his bankers for the eight thousand and odd guineas he had lost to the Captain.

"My convenience?" cried Pauncefort, and his white face writhed in a spasm of mocking laughter. "I tell you, man, that in all the world I cannot claim ten guineas for my own. You are a gamester, Captain Gaynor?" he ended between question and assertion.

"So rumour says of me—I confess with justice," the Captain admitted, and the faintest of ironic smiles quivered on his firm lips.

"I am engaged at present in a game wherein I have staked my head. Has your lordship ever played as deep as

that?"

"Ay, have I. Do I not tell you, man, that I have staked my honour; and honour, surely, is more than life."

"So I have heard say," answered Captain Gaynor, like a sceptic.

He had little comfort for his host, little encouragement for the confidences that Pauncefort insisted upon thrusting on him. Indeed, it was his deliberate aim to stifle them. He desired them not. Although his acquaintance with Lord Pauncefort was considerable, it was not an acquaintance that had ever ripened, or promised to ripen, into friendship. The link that bound them was their common devotion to the Stuart Cause, whose agent Captain Gaynor was. Beyond that they had no common interest, although, when all is said, that might be accounted interest enough to bind two men at such a time.

But, despite the Captain's chill aloofness, his lordship was not to be repressed. In the nature of this man of so strong and noble-seeming a countenance there was a strain of weakness almost feminine. He was of those who must forever be proclaiming griefs and grievances, finding it impossible to bear in silence and in dignity the burden of their woes. He was of those who in their trouble must forever be confiding in the hope of lessening their oppression. Moreover he had at present another motive for his confidence: a faint hope that it might bear him fruit, as you shall see.

"Listen," he said, and upon the heels of that exhortation swiftly poured out the tale of his condition. "I was broke six months ago, when the South-Sea Bubble was pricked. I

gambled heavily in the stock and, like many another, woke one morning to find that a fortune had melted in my hands. This rascally Whig Government—" He was beginning upon a side issue, when he broke off abruptly to return to his main theme. "To buy that stock I raised heavy mortgages. I raised still more to clear myself after that cataclysm, and I mortgaged what was left to recoup my losses. Instead—But there! Tonight I played for my immediate needs. I played to twice the extent of the losses I could meet, and in that I played the knave. But my need was very urgent, Captain. Now—it is over." He dabbed his brow again. His voice grew calmer with the dead calm of despair. "If I have the courage to be alive by noon tomorrow, the spunging-house awaits me." He shivered in his splendid garments, and the jewelled buttons of his salmon-coloured waistcoat twinkled roguishly as if conscious of the irony of their presence in the apparel of a pauper.

Captain Gaynor stood considering a moment, the expression—the mask—of studied concern upon his face, increasing contempt and disgust in his heart.

Was it upon such men as this that his master counted? And he recalled the eulogistic words in which his prince had spoken of this adherent.

"Pauncefort is powerful and loyal," he had said. "He is ours body and soul and to the last penny of his fortunes."

That was the dream of that august man of dreams. Here, confronting Captain Gaynor, was the reality—a broken gamester who whimpered over his losses.

"Surely, surely," said the soldier slowly, "there is one thing you have forgot."

Pauncefort looked up quickly, his black brows contracting. "If it be aught I can raise money upon, in God's name tell it me quickly," said he, with a wry smile.

"I think it is," replied the Captain. "You have forgot Miss Hollinstone."

The contraction of his lordship's brows grew heavier still, and the fine countenance assumed a something of haughtiness and of challenge. Undeterred Captain Gaynor proceeded to make plain his meaning.

"Your betrothal to Damaris Hollinstone is known to all the world, just as it is also known that she is the wealthiest heiress in England, mistress of a fortune that is colossal. Surely, sir, with such a prospect before you, your creditors —"

He was interrupted by a sharp laugh.

"You have had no dealings, sir, with the tribe of Judah. That is plain," said his lordship bitterly. "Oh, be very sure that I have attempted it—to be met with veiled derision and open insolence. You do not know the Jew. You do not know the hatred of the Christian that underlies his dealings, the vampire spirit that actuates him. Shakespeare, sir, knew his nature when he limned his Shylock."

"Perhaps," suggested Captain Gaynor, "the Christian has deserved no better at his hands."

It was a point of view so revolutionary, so subversive of all the notions upon which Lord Pauncefort had been bred, that for a moment it drove every other consideration from his mind, leaving his face blank with astonishment. But his own affairs swept back upon him in an instant to turn him from any disputing upon so wild a matter.

"You are a gamester, Captain Gaynor, and all gamesters are prone to come to such a state as mine tonight. Let me give—it is all that remains me to bestow on anyone—a piece of advice upon the subtle art of raising money. See to it ever in such affairs that betimes you raise at least twice as much as you can ever repay out of your own resources. Then your creditors, for their own purses' sakes, will afford you every opportunity; they will handle you tenderly; they will nurse you with care; they will watch over you as never mother watched her babe at its first steps.

"Had I but had such advice given me and acted upon it, I should not be in such case as this in which you find me. Money would have flowed freely to my hands upon the prospect of my marriage, because upon the consummation of that would have depended my creditors' reimbursement. As it is, sir, I have fallen into the error of borrowing no more than my estates can bear.

"The chief of my creditors is a Spanish Jew, one Israel Suarez, an evil rogue of fabulous wealth and destitute of mercy; one who seems to draw a Satanic joy from the torturing and breaking of such men as I. I tell you, Captain Gaynor, that I have abased myself to plead with him. I have besought him in terms I cannot recall without shame that if he will not concede me a loan upon my marriage prospects, at least to postpone his demand for settlement of my present debts until my marriage shall have taken place.

"My intercessions have been met with the sneers and insolent jests of this usurious dog. He holds my mortgages for everything that is not in the entail. That almost covers my debt to him. The balance he will recover from the

interest on the entailed estates what time I am rotting in a debtors' gaol. Frankly he tells me this—that since he can retrieve his own he will run no risks. And so, tomorrow—" He spread his hands, shrugged, and sank back scowling again into his chair.

Captain Gaynor understood, but he answered nothing. What answer could he make? He looked towards the windows, which were glowing now like moonstones in the increasing light. Again he thought of going, and vaguely he wondered why Lord Pauncefort should have chosen him for these confidences. He conceived that it was fortuitous—the result of his having lingered after the others had departed. But in his lordship's next words he had the correct answer to his unspoken question.

"Had I refrained tonight," his lordship was saying presently in a small unsteady voice, his fingers plucking nervously at a card which he had picked up from the floor, "all might yet have been well. By meeting a bill that is due tomorrow I might temporarily have satisfied the demands of that foul vulture, Suarez. I should have gained time, and with time salvation might have come. I have sunk money in a trading venture which may yet repay me. But for this, time is needed; time and—and the money I have lost tonight. I held it in readiness for this, but the cursed cards—"

He broke off with a bitter oath. But he had said enough. It would have been impossible to have asked more plainly for the help that it was in Gaynor's power to render him.

The Captain understood at last the reason of these confidences.

Understanding brought with it some pity and more contempt. I fear me his nature was a little hard. He spoke out plainly, his voice crisp.

"You are inviting me, my lord, to return you this," he said, and from his breast pocket he took Lord Pauncefort's draft upon his bankers.

He was, as I have said, a man of swift decisions, and here he had decided swiftly, but not at all as his host conceived.

Pauncefort threw back his head under the goad of that voice. It seemed to him that it conveyed a deadly insult. For all that the matter was true enough; the manner could not, he thought, have been more outrageous.

"Sir!" said he, with a very frosty dignity, and upon the word he rose, frowning darkly. "Sir, you affront me."

"Forgive me," answered the soldier gently "Such was not my intent." He replaced the draft in his pocket. "And yet," he sighed; "I conceived that I saw a way to assist you."

The unexpectedness of this withdrawal scattered his lordship's fine dignity to the murmuring winds of dawn. His jaw dropped in sheer astonishment; his eyes stared foolishly; the card he had held fluttered from his nerveless fingers. He leaned against the table, and looked at his guest.

"Perhaps ..." he said, faltering on the word, "perhaps my refusal was churlish."

"I understand it," said Gaynor quietly But behind his imperturbable mask he was laughing at his lordship.

"When all is said," the other resumed, "if you could—if I might so far trespass upon your patience and you would wait until a more convenient season—"

Captain Gaynor took him up at once. "Wait?" he echoed, and he frowned thoughtfully "Wait?" He laughed, a little laugh that was singularly pleasant despite the tinge of irony that invested it. "Ye have indeed mistook me," he said.

"How?" quoth his lordship, flung back once more upon his dignity.

"Faith," said the Captain, "you'll agree, I think, that I am in little case to wait. If it please me to gamble upon my own life it does not please me that others should do the same—leastways without ever a stake set against so very valuable a property You forget, my lord" (and instinctively he lowered his voice), "a thousand guineas is the advertised value of this head of mine. At any moment that value may be claimed. In England here I walk amid drawn swords. If I consented to do your pleasure in this matter, at any moment one of these might liquidate the debt." He laughed again. "It is a game in which the odds are much too heavy in your favour, and, moreover, a game in which you adventure nothing."

"I—I had not considered that," his lordship exclaimed with earnestness. "'Pon honour, I had not."

"I do not do you the injustice to suppose it. But consider it now, I beg."

"I do. I thank you for enlightening me." He stood erect, his handsome face pale but quite composed. "Captain Gaynor, there is no more to be said."

"Nay, now, I think there is," returned the other, smiling quietly.

"I do not understand."

"Pray consider further. I am a gamester, as you have said, as every soldier of fortune is perforce. And being poor in point of worldly goods, my life is a stake for which I am well used to playing. Out of consideration for your straits, I will permit that you too play, as it were, upon it and for this eight thousand guineas that I have won. But you must set a stake against it, my lord—and a heavy one to balance all the odds that are in your favour."

He spoke quietly, his face so calm, his glance so steady that none might have suspected the excitement within. Lord Pauncefort stared and stared. At length—"I have talked in vain, it seems," said he. "Yet I have told you plainly that I cannot claim so much as ten guineas for my own. What, then, have I to stake?"

"Something that is hardly yours," came the gentle answer, "and something which, if I win from you, I shall yet have to win another way and may altogether fail to win." He smiled a wry smile, his steely eyes upon the other's face. "You perceive, my lord, that the odds are all with you. It cannot be said that I lack generosity in the risks I take."

"I do not understand you," said his lordship bluntly. "What stake have you in mind?"

There was a perceptible pause before the soldier answered him.

He squared his shoulders; his face became set and stern; his glance flickered a moment to the windows and the dawn, which, from the pallor of the moonstone, was warming now to opalescent fires. Then his eyes returned to Lord Pauncefort's impatient questioning face.

"Damaris Hollinstone," he said quietly.

Chapter 2. THE GAME

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Lord Pauncefort fell back a pace, as if before a blow. The reflections of a surge of feelings from astonishment through contempt to positive anger sped across his heavily featured face. He leaned against the card-table and surveyed his guest with eyes that from their first gape of surprise came to blaze with unmistakable malevolence.

Captain Gaynor, cool, erect, with something of defiance in his mien, waited patiently until his lordship should choose to break the brooding silence. At length came a little sneering laugh from the viscount, and on its heels the sneering words: "Blister me! You play strange games, Captain Gaynor."

"It is true," Gaynor admitted, "and," he added, stung a little, "with strange players sometimes. You will admit at least my generosity in the matter of the odds?"

"Fore gad, yes!" the other exploded in a storm of contempt. "I am glad ye have the grace to admit it."

"I have never lacked for grace," said the Captain complacently His lordship struck the table with his clenched hand. "Let us understand each other," he demanded savagely.

"'Tis what I most desire."

"In a word then: What is Miss Hollinstone to you?"

"In a word, my lord—nothing."

"Nothing? Nothing? And yet you—"

"Spare me your jealousy, I pray," the soldier interrupted, and ran on undismayed by the other's haughty frown:

"There is no need for it here. I have never so much as set eyes upon Miss Hollinstone. You see in me no rival for the lady's affections. I know not whether she be tall or short, fair or dark, fat or lean. I know her as the greatest heiress in these islands—a lady of surpassing wealth. I know her in no other way and in no other way do I desire to know her."

The contempt, the disgust on the nobleman's face was overwhelming.

"By God, Captain Gaynor!" he cried, in a voice thick with passion, "I have welcomed you to my house. I have sat at table with you. I have deemed you a gentleman."

"Ah! And you find me?" quoth the Captain, entirely unruffled, yet with a challenging note in the question. But the other answered him undeterred. "I find you a—a jackal. You have spoken of yourself as an adventurer, a soldier of fortune. I did not dream what depths of degradation the term could imply. You have put an affront upon me in making me this proposal. 'Twas to consider me your equal in baseness. It is an insult for which you shall give me satisfaction. Fore gad, you shall!"

The soldier of fortune stood a little pale before that onslaught. His lips were set, and in his steely eyes there was a cold glitter before which men of bigger heart than Pauncefort had quailed in their time. He moved at length from his position before the empty fireplace, and sauntered, a graceful, supple figure, to the windows. There he stood a moment gazing out upon the breaking day, what time his host's eyes followed him, angry and impatient.

The Captain was revolving something in his mind, debating something eminently distasteful. It went against

his wayward, imperious nature to explain himself to any man. Many had misunderstood his motives aforetime; and he had left them in a misunderstanding, for which they had not infrequently paid dearly.

Yet here was a man whom that night's business had taught him to despise, and he found himself urged to offer explanations of his conduct to such a man. It was repugnant to him; yet it must be done if he were to have his way in this, if he were to carry through this thing upon which, with his characteristic swiftness, he had determined.

He turned at last, and with his back to the window he faced his host.

"If I apprehend you aright, my lord," said he, and the calm and dignity of his voice and mien, the force of his singularly compelling personality, impressed the other into lending him an ear notwithstanding the disgust and impatience that possessed him, "if I apprehend you aright it is not with my proposal so much as with my motives that you quarrel. If I had been able to say to you, 'I love Miss Hollinstone,' you would have viewed my proposal differently?"

His lordship flung out an arm in anger. "Perhaps," he rasped. "What matter?"

"Oh! A deal," replied the other. "Had I been able to say that, then, indeed, would my proposal have been base and ignoble; then, indeed, would you have been right to deem yourself affronted and to demand of me satisfaction. You are surprised at my point of view, my lord? I do not think we are like to see eye to eye in many things; but I would you could see eye to eye with me in this, that you could understand—

as you are very far from doing—the true motives out of which I am acting."

Lord Pauncefort bowed, not without irony. "Proceed, sir," he invited his guest. "If anything you can say will mitigate the judgment I have formed—"

"I care nothing for your judgments, my lord," came the sharp, almost passionate interruption. "When men have lived such lives as mine, believe me, they are very far from being touched by the judgments of those whose lives have been smooth and sheltered. In all this world there is but one thing I care for, one Cause in which were I not prepared to lay down my life tomorrow I should not be tonight in England. None knows that better than your lordship. If I have a hope of personal fortune, it is a remote and distant hope, to follow upon, as it is bound up with, the fortune of another. For ten years have I waited, acquiring knowledge in foreign service, steeling and tempering myself for the great service that is to come. I am in the twenty-ninth year of my age; the first flush of my youth is over, spent without regrets, consecrated like a novitiate to fit me for my task. The cup of youth's pleasures is one that my lips have never touched. The love of woman has passed me by. The money that has come to me in the course of services that I have hired to others has gone, most of it, to the Cause on which my heart is set. If it please Almighty God that my hopes bear fruit, that my labours yield return, I shall have my reward and I shall rest me at last. If not," and a shadow crossed the face and dimmed the almost fanatical glow of the blue eyes, "I shall still have my reward within myself—in

the glory of the memory of the service rendered to that exiled one in Rome.

"You know of whom I speak, my lord, to what service I refer. Tonight I sat down to play here with money that I scarce dared call my own. Had I lost, it would have been so much lost to the Cause; as I have won, it is but just that I count it still money to be devoted to this sacred enterprise; and under no circumstances, sir, would my honour have permitted me, as for a moment you supposed, to return you the draft and await a convenience that may never come.

"My lord, you know full well that our Cause is most desperately in need of funds. His Majesty lives almost upon charity." There was something akin to a sob in his voice. "Think of it, my lord! You count yourself one of his servants, one of his loyal adherents. You plot and scheme and pray for his return because you believe and are loyal to the rightful king. Can you, then, contemplate his straitened circumstances without feeling yourself humbled and ashamed? Consider how the money you have dissipated here—"

He broke off suddenly. "But let that be! I am speaking of myself, I think. I have said that this money I have won from you I scarce consider mine. Yet will I adventure it again as I adventured that other. I will adventure it to win more—to win the fortune of Miss Hollinstone, that I may turn it to a like sacred purpose.

"Now, sir," he ended abruptly, "you are informed of the precise height and depth of my baseness; you have the precise measure of the insult I have offered you." And he turned again to the window swiftly, that the other should not

see the scalding tears that welled to his eyes, man of iron though he was.

My lord sank to a chair and took his head in his hands, beaten down by the storm of that man's fervour—that man whom he had dubbed in scorn and disgust a self-seeking fortune hunter.

Something of the soldier's enthusiasm had stirred him, and in its wake had come a burning, searing shame at the reflection of what were Gaynor's motives, what his own. The small voice of his conscience whispered mockingly that it was he was the fortune hunter, he that was vile and base, he that, without faith or loyalty, had lent himself to a cause whose prevailing was his forlorn hope, the last perceptible means by which to mend his shattered fortunes.

"Captain Gaynor," he said at last, in a hushed voice, "I ask your pardon for my misapprehension of you."

The Captain swung round and faced him again—master of himself once more, calm and self-contained.

"Is it your pleasure, then, that we play?" he asked.

But here his lordship's face again grew dark, reflecting thoughts of which the soldier could have no knowledge, else he would not have insisted as he did.

"Consider, my lord," he cried, "that all the odds are on your side. On the one hand you stand to win; on the other, to lose nothing that is not lost already."

My lord threw up his head, something between amazement and anger in his eyes. "How?" he cried with extraordinary vehemence. "What is't you mean?"

To himself Captain Gaynor cursed the fellow's dullness. He proceeded to explain.

"You have said that, unless you have this money tomorrow, a debtors' gaol awaits you. In such a case will not Miss Hollinstone be lost to you? Do you dream that her uncle and guardian, Sir John Kynaston, will permit this betrothal to continue? It is your only chance that I am offering you, my lord. For your own sake, no less than for mine, you should consent."

It was so clear and plain that Pauncefort for a moment turned the notion over in his mind, and something else—a further unsuspected advantage that must lie with him in such a game, an advantage, indeed, which made a mock of it and himself no better than a cheat did he consent. He frowned in doubt and perplexity. The perplexity he voiced at last.

"How do you look to profit by my loss?" he asked.

Captain Gaynor considered a moment. He came forward and leaned upon the table opposite to his lordship.

"The conquest of a woman so wounded in her pride and vanity should not be an insuperable task. Under the urge of pique she may welcome a suitor who at another time might be disdained. That is my opportunity; none so great, as you may judge; so that here again the odds are all with you. Given the opportunity, however, I am not unpersonable; I have seen the world, and I could no doubt, upon occasion, develop the antics which delight a woman." He spoke quite coldly. "For the rest, not only is her uncle on our side, not only does he expect me at Priory Close on Thursday, but he holds me in some affection; so that the way lies open to me."

"You speak of wounds to her pride and vanity."

"Those consequent upon your lordship's withdrawal of your suit," said Captain Gaynor crisply, his steely eyes full upon the other's.

But his lordship was not dominated by the glance. He smote the table with his clenched hand. "No!" he roared. "Sink me into perdition, no!"

It was a cry of conscience; the repudiation which common honesty demanded. But Captain Gaynor rated it at a still higher value. Slightly he inclined his head. He spread his hands a little. "Be it so," said he. "We will say no more. I think, with your permission, I will take my leave. The sun is rising."

But the alternative gaped before Pauncefort like a yawning chasm upon whose brink he tottered. He clutched the soldier's sleeve.

"Stay!" he cried. "When a man has lost all else, what matters honour?"

"There are some causes to which one may sacrifice honour and remain honourable. You will remember that should I win, and should all speed thereafter as I desire it, you will have done the Cause perhaps the best service that lay within your power."

"Should you win?" said the other. His face was ghastly. "Ah, but should you lose—" He broke off abruptly. "How shall we play?"

"What would you propose?" quoth Captain Gaynor, controlling the exultation that strained within him like a hound upon the leash.

My lord rose, his dark face was almost sinister now. He passed a white, jewelled hand over his long, cleft chin.

"Such a game as this," he said, "should be played, I think, with other tools than dice or cards. Honour is here involved, and with honour should go life as well."

"That," said the Captain composedly, "depends upon the point of view, and you and I, my lord, again do not see eye to eye. I do not count this game dishonouring, else you may be very sure I should not engage in it."

"You do not—true!" His lordship winced as he realised the difference, dependent upon their respective motives. "But you do not think of me."

"If I did not," said Gaynor sweetly, "I should accept the game with the tools you have in mind. But those, my lord, are the tools of my trade, and they should place the advantage too heavily with me."

He uttered it as a commonplace; there was no scintilla of boastfulness in his cold statement of an irrefragable fact. His lordship laughed, short and bitterly.

"In that case," said he, "we had better use the tools of mine." And he gathered up the cards that were spread upon the table. "You are, as you have insisted, the incarnation of generosity, Captain Gaynor."

"I am glad that at last you begin to perceive it," said the soldier amiably. "Shall it hang upon a single cut'" He placed my lord's draft upon the table as he spoke.

His lordship glanced at it, and then at the soldier. "Will you not give your generosity a free rein?" said he. "Will you not add to that the other two thousand that you have won from my guests tonight?"

Gaynor, masking his contempt, drew from his pocket another note of hand and a heavy purse. These, too, he

placed upon the table.

"Shall I throw in my head as well?" he asked. "It is valued at a thousand guineas."

Pauncefort looked at him with hostile eyes, resentful of the sneer that underlay his words. "I am content," he said.

Captain Gaynor smiled, took the cards from his lordship, shuffled them with steady fingers and placed the pack upon the table.

"A single cut," he repeated, and by a gesture invited his lordship to go first.

The viscount put forth a shaking hand, cut, and displayed the four of spades. His face turned ashen.

"Sink me!" he raged. "I was a fool to have consented! God knows I have had proof enough that my luck is dead tonight."

The Captain made him no answer, but reaching for the pack cut in his turn.

It was then that he gave his lordship the sorely needed lesson in the art of graceful losing. He smiled and shook his head in deprecation of his lordship's passion.

"You cursed your luck too soon, my lord," said he. He had cut the three of diamonds.

As he walked along Jermyn Street, flooded now with the radiance of the new-risen sun, he smiled pensively. The gods had given him a wondrous chance and a little fortune of ten thousand pounds. He pondered some of the things that might have been accomplished with that sum. Then he dismissed the matter from his mind without another regret.

He was by temperament, you see, the perfect gamester.

Chapter 3. MR SECOND SECRETARY

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However undeniable it may be that Captain Gaynor was a man inured to danger and prepared to accept all risks that came his way, yet it is no less undeniable that he never accepted a risk that was unnecessary. Daring he was, but not reckless. The care and precaution with which he laid his plans, the thought which he devoted to their formulation and the elaborate pains he took in their execution were all calculated to reduce his risk to the lowest fraction. He overlooked nothing, neglected nothing, and rarely moved into a situation from which he had not prepared himself an avenue of retreat in the event of sudden danger.

As a result of all this, although the Government was aware of the existence of a singularly daring Jacobite agent, who spied and plotted, came and went between the Pretender's Court at Rome and his adherents in England, and although the country was sown with proclamations offering a thousand guineas for his apprehension, the identity of this agent remained unknown. No definite description of him existed; indeed, the descriptions forthcoming at various times offered such glaring discrepancies one with another that it almost seemed as if his exploits were not those of an individual, but of a group.

He was generally known as "Captain Jenkyn" though none could say how the sobriquet had arisen. As "Captain Jenkyn" he was referred to in all reports concerning his movements which the Government spies were from time to time enabled to lay before the Secretary of State, and

"Captain Jenkyn" was the name in those proclamations which offered a thousand guineas for his head.

But no man who was not of the party—and only one or two who were—had ever consciously come face to face with Captain Jenkyn. On the day when that should happen, on the day when a Government agent or emissary should hail him to his face by that nom de guerre, on that day, he was resolved, he would sink his own identity—cast it from him like a garment that has served its turn—for the sake of the many whose connection with Captain Harry Gaynor might be traced and whose lives might in consequence be jeopardised. On that day his career as an agent would be at an end. Even if with the mask plucked from him he should succeed in making good his escape from the perils that would then surround him, another must thereafter take up his work. Such was his resolve against a contingency which the elaborate quality of his plans permitted him to account remote.

It is in the perfection of these plans that towards noon of that day whose dawn saw him departing from Pauncefort House we find the Captain in one of the last places in London where we should look for a man engaged upon such a mission as his own—in the anteroom of Mr Second Secretary Templeton's residence in Old Palace Yard.

Three months ago, in Rome, Captain Gaynor had renewed an old acquaintance with one Sir Richard Tollemache Templeton, who had served with him under Marlborough in the days of the late Queen—days in which Harry Gaynor had been acquiring the rudiments of the art by which he was to live. Since then Tollemache Templeton

had succeeded to the baronetcy, left the service, and was now repairing an omission in his education by making the grand tour.

Sir Richard was the Second Secretary's cousin, and Gaynor had been quick to seize upon that circumstance, and upon their old acquaintance, to provide against his forthcoming mission into England. For a month he had flung in his lot with the lounging Sir Richard. Together they had roamed over Southern Italy, the Captain representing himself as a soldier of fortune out of work just then, to whom time was of no account and upon whom the allurements of Sir Richard's company proved compelling. He had very materially improved the acquaintance between them during that month. It had warmed and quickened into a friendship, very genuine on Sir Richard's part, and only a little less so on the other's.

Most subtly had Captain Gaynor succeeded in conveying to the baronet an entirely wrong conception of his aims. So cleverly, indeed, had he done his work that in the end the suggestion which it was his intention ultimately to make to Sir Richard, Sir Richard actually made to him.

They were lounging together on the cliffs at Capri one breathless, languid morning, when the Captain, by way of leading up to what he had in mind, fell to bewailing the passing of the need for the soldier of fortune in Europe. He deplored his own enforced idleness; states were at peace; employment for such as himself was not easily to be discovered; he had come hopefully to Italy, looking for turbulence in the peninsula to afford him his opportunity; but his hopes were proved vain; his purse was growing

lighter and no prospect showed upon the horizon; he spoke gloomily of returning to the East, regretted almost having left it. Subtlest of all was the last touch he added, and for the glaring untruth of it the justification he offered to his conscience was the great cause he served, the ultimate good to be achieved, if necessary, by ignoble means.

"There is the Pretender, now," he said slowly, "and I have thought of him. Indeed, he's all there's left to think of here. But there is little to attract me in thought. I may be a follower of Fortune's banner, a man who makes of fighting as much a trade as others make of tinkering or haberdashery, but, on my soul, Dick, there are limits even to that. The Pretender is the enemy of England" (he prayed heaven to pardon him that necessary blasphemy), "and Harry Gaynor's sword although for hire shall never be hired to any disloyal cause." He sighed and laughed his musical, self-mocking little laugh.

"I dare swear you'll count me foolish, Dick, to strain at a gnat who have swallowed camels."

But Sir Richard's face was very grave; approval shone in his frank eyes.

"On my soul I do not, Harry," he cried heartily, like the thorough-paced Whig he was. "I honour you for your feelings. I would not have a friend of mine hold any other. But," he continued, frowning thoughtfully, "since you feel thus, why not let profit and inclination jump together? Why not find employment for your sword in the service that enlists your heart?"

The Captain's pulses throbbed a little faster. For here from Sir Richard came the very proposal to which so warily