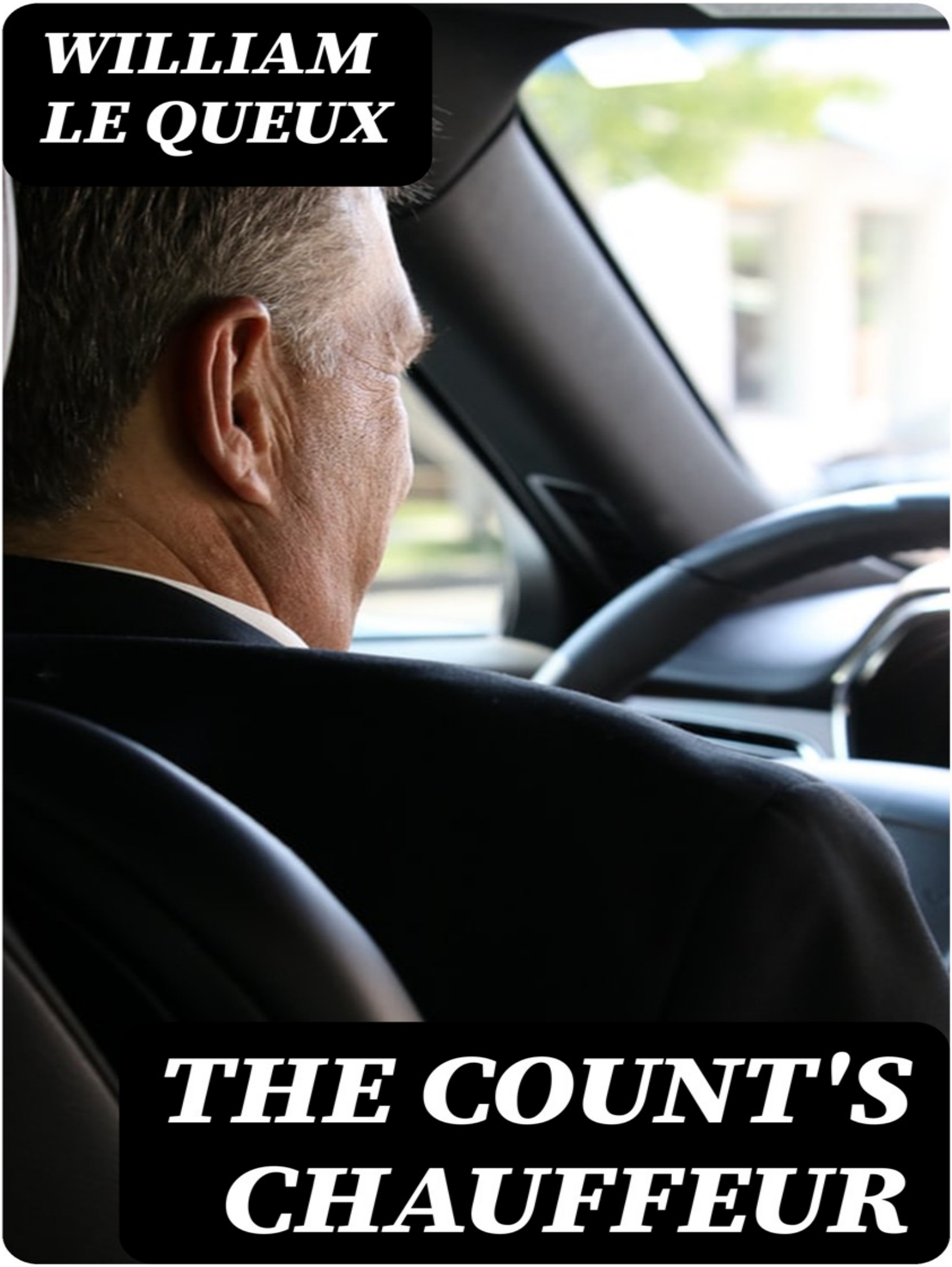
WILLIAM LE QUEUX
THE COUNT'S CHAUFFEUR


WILLIAM
LE QUEUX
THE COUNT'S
CHAUFFEUR

William Le Queux

The Count's Chauffeur

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CHAPTER I

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A MOVE ON THE “FORTY”

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In Paris, in Rome, in Florence, in Berlin, in Vienna—in fact, over half the face of Europe, from the Pyrenees to the Russian frontier—I am now known as “The Count’s Chauffeur.”

An Englishman, as my name George Ewart denotes, I am of cosmopolitan birth and education, my early youth having been spent on the Continent, where my father was agent for a London firm.

When I was fourteen, my father, having prospered, came to London, and established himself as an agent in Wood Street, City, representing a great firm of silk manufacturers in Lyons.

At twenty I tried City life, but an office with a high stool, a dusty ledger, and sandwich lunches, had no attraction for me. I had always had a turn for mechanics, but was never allowed to adopt engineering as a profession, my father’s one idea being that I should follow in his footsteps—a delusive hope entertained by many a fond parent.

Six months of office life sufficed me. One day I went home to Teddington and refused to return again to Wood Street. This resulted in an open quarrel between my father and myself, with the result that a week later I was on my way to Canada. In a year I was back again, and, after some months of semi-starvation in London, I managed to obtain a

job in a motor factory. I was then entirely in my element. During two years I learned the mechanism of the various petrol-driven cars, until I became classed as an expert driver and engineer.

At the place I was employed there was manufactured one of the best and most expensive makes of English car, and, being at length placed on the testing staff, it was my duty to take out each new chassis for its trial-run before being delivered to a customer.

Upon my certificate each chassis was declared in perfect running order, and was then handed over to the body-makers indicated by the purchaser.

Being an expert driver, my firm sent me to drive in the Tourist Trophy races in the Isle of Man, and I likewise did the Ardennes Circuit and came in fourth in the Brescia race for the Florio Cup, my successes, of course, adding glory and advertisement to the car I drove.

Racing, however, aroused within me, as it does in every motorist, an ardent desire to travel long distances. The testing of those chassis in Regent’s Park, and an occasional run with some wealthy customer out on the Great North Road or on the Bath or Brighton roads, became too quiet a life for me. I was now seized by a desire to tour and see Europe. True, in my capacity of tester, I met all classes of men. In the seat beside me have sat Cabinet Ministers, Dukes, Indian Rajahs, Members of Parliament, and merchant princes, customers or prospective purchasers, all of whom chatted with me, mostly displaying their ignorance of the first principles of mechanics. It was all pleasant enough—a

merry life and good pay. Yet I hated London, and the height of my ambition was a good car to drive abroad.

After some months of waiting, the opportunity came, and I seized it.

By appointment, at the Royal Automobile Club one grey December morning, I met Count Bindo di Ferraris, a young Italian aristocrat, whose aspect, however, was the reverse of that of a Southerner. About thirty, he was tall, lithe, and well dressed in a dark-brown lounge suit. His complexion, his chestnut hair, his erect, rather soldierly bearing, his clean-shaven face, and his open countenance gave him every appearance of an English gentleman. Indeed, I at first took him for an Englishman, for he spoke English so perfectly.

When he had examined my testimonials and made a number of inquiries, he asked—

“You speak French?”

“Yes,” was my reply; “a little Italian, and a little German.”

“Italian!” he exclaimed in surprise. “Excellent!”

Then, while we sat alone, with no one within hearing, he told me the terms upon which he was willing to engage me to drive on the Continent, and added—

“Your salary will be doubled—providing I find you entirely loyal to me. That is to say, you must know how to keep your mouth closed—understand?”

And he regarded me rather curiously, I thought.

“No,” I answered; “I don’t quite understand.”

“Well, well, there are matters—private family matters—of which you will probably become cognisant. Truth to tell, I want help—the help of a good, careful driver who isn’t afraid, and who is always discreet. I may as well tell you

that before I wrote to you I made certain secret inquiries regarding you, and I feel confident that you can serve me very much to our mutual advantage."

This puzzled me, and my curiosity was further aroused when he added—

"To be plain, there is a certain young lady in very high society in the case. I need not tell you more, need I? You will be discreet, eh?"

I smiled and promised. What did it all mean? I wondered. My employer was mysterious; but in due course I should, as he prophesied, obtain knowledge of this secret—a secret love affair, no doubt.

The Count's private affairs did not, after all, concern me. My duty was to drive on the Continent, and for what he was to pay me I was to serve him loyally, and see that his tyre and petrol bills were not too exorbitant.

He went to the writing-table and wrote out a short agreement which he copied, and we both signed it—a rather curiously worded agreement by which I was to serve him for three years, and during that time our interests were "to be mutual." That last phrase caused me to wonder, but I scribbled my name and refrained from comment, for the payment was already double that which I was receiving from the firm.

"My car is outside," he remarked, as he folded his copy of the agreement and placed it in his pocket. "Did you notice it?"

I had not, so we went out into Piccadilly together, and there, standing at the kerb, I saw a car that caused my heart to bound with delight—a magnificent six-cylinder forty

horse-power “Napier,” of the very latest model. The car was open, with side entrance, a dark green body with coronet and cipher on the panels, upholstered in red, with glass removable screen to the splashboard—a splendid, workmanlike car just suitable for long tours and fast runs. Of all the cars and of all the makes, that was the only one which it was my ambition to drive.

I walked around it in admiration, and saw that every accessory was the best and very latest that money could buy—even to the newly invented gas-generator which had only a few weeks ago been placed upon the market. I lifted the long bonnet, looked around the engine, and saw those six cylinders in a row—the latest invention of a celebrated inventor.

“Splendid!” I ejaculated. “There’s nothing yet to beat this car. By Jove! we can get a move on a good road!”

“Yes,” smiled the Count. “My man Mario could make her travel, but he’s a fool, and has left me in a fit of temper. He was an Italian, and we Italians are, alas! hot-headed,” and he laughed again. “Would you like to try her?”

I assented with delight, and, while he returned inside the Club to get his fur coat, I started the engine and got in at the steering-wheel. A few moments later he seated himself beside me, and we glided down Piccadilly on our way to Regent’s Park—the ground where, day after day, it had been my habit to go testing. The car ran perfectly, the engines sounding a splendid rhythm through the Regent Street traffic into broad Portland Place, and on into the Park, where I was afforded some scope to see what she could do. The Count declared that he was in no hurry, therefore we went

up through Hampstead to Highgate Station, and then on the Great North Road, through East End, Whetstone, Barnet, and Hatfield, to Hitchin—thirty-five miles of road which was as well known to me as the Strand.

The morning was dry and cold, the roads in excellent condition bar a few patches of new metal between Codicote and Chapelfoot, and the sharp east wind compelled us to goggle. Fortunately, I had on my leather-lined frieze coat, and was therefore fully equipped. The North Road between London and Hitchin is really of little use for trying the speed of a car, for there are so many corners, it is mostly narrow, and it abounds in police-traps. That twenty miles of flat, straight road, with perfect surface, from Lincoln to New Holland, opposite Hull, is one of the best places in England to see what a car is worth.

Nevertheless, the run to Hitchin satisfied me perfectly that the car was not a “roundabout,” as so many are, but a car well “within the meaning of the Act.”

“And what is your opinion of her, Ewart?” asked the Count, as we sat down to cold beef and pickles in the long, old-fashioned upstairs room of the Sun Inn at Hitchin.

“Couldn’t be better,” I declared. “The brakes would do with re-lining, but that’s about all. When do we start for the Continent?”

“The day after to-morrow. I’m staying just now at the Cecil. We’ll run the car down to Folkestone, ship her across, and then go by Paris and Aix to Monte Carlo first; afterwards we’ll decide upon our itinerary. Ever been to Monty?”

I replied in the negative. The prospect of going on the Riviera sounded delightful.

After our late luncheon we ran back from Hitchin to London, but, not arriving before lighting-up time, we had to turn on the head-lights beyond Barnet. We drove straight to the fine garage on the Embankment beneath the Cecil, and after I had put things square and received orders for ten o’clock next day, I was preparing to go to my lodgings in Bloomsbury to look through my kit in preparation for the journey when my employer suddenly exclaimed—

“Come up to the smoking-room a moment. I want to write a letter for you to take to Boodle’s in St. James’s Street, for me, if you will.”

I followed him upstairs to the great blue-tiled smoking-room overlooking the Embankment, and as we entered, two well-dressed men—Englishmen, of aristocratic bearing—rose from a table and shook him warmly by the hand.

I noticed their quick, apprehensive look as they glanced at me as though in inquiry, but my employer exclaimed—

“This is my new chauffeur, Ewart, an expert. Ewart, these are my friends—Sir Charles Blythe,” indicating the elder man, “and Mr. Henderson. These gentlemen will perhaps be with us sometimes, so you had better know them.”

The pair looked me up and down and smiled pleasantly. Sir Charles was narrow-faced, about fifty, with a dark beard turning grey; his companion was under thirty, a fair-haired, rather foppishly dressed young fellow, in a fashionable suit and a light fancy vest.

Then, as the Count went to the table to write, Sir Charles inquired where we had been, and whether I had driven much on the Continent.

When the Count handed me the letter, I saw that he exchanged a meaning glance with Sir Charles, but what it was intended to convey I could not guess. I only know that, for a few seconds, I felt some vague distrust of my new friends, and yet they treated me more as an equal than as a mere chauffeur.

The Count's friends were certainly a merry, easy-going pair, yet somehow I instinctively held them in suspicion. Whether it was on account of the covert glance which Sir Charles shot across at my employer, or whether there was something unusual about their manner, I cannot tell. I am only aware that when I left the hotel I went on my way in wonder.

Next day, at ten punctually, I ran the car from the Strand into the courtyard of the hotel and pulled up at the restaurant entrance, so as to be out of the way of the continuous cab traffic. The Count, however, did not make his appearance until nearly half an hour later, and when he did arrive he superintended the despatch by cab of a quantity of luggage which he told me he was sending forward by *grande vitesse* to Monte Carlo.

After the four-wheeler had moved off, the hall-porter helped him on with his big fur coat, and he, getting up beside me, told me to drive to Piccadilly.

As we were crossing Trafalgar Square into Pall Mall, he turned to me, saying—

"Remember, Ewart, your promise yesterday. If my actions —I mean, if you think I am a little peculiar sometimes, don't trouble your head about it. You are paid to drive—and paid well, I think. My affairs don't concern you, do they?"

“Not in the least,” I answered, nevertheless puzzled.

He descended at a tobacconist’s in Bond Street, and bought a couple of boxes of cigars, and then made several calls at shops, also visiting two jewellers to obtain, he remarked, a silver photograph frame of a certain size.

At Gilling’s—the third shop he tried—he remained inside some little time—quite twenty minutes, I should think. As you know, it is in the narrowest part of Bond Street, and the traffic was congested owing to the road at the Piccadilly end being partially up.

As I sat in my place, staring idly before me, and reflecting that I should be so soon travelling due South over the broad, well-kept French roads, and out of the gloom and dreariness of the English winter, I suddenly became conscious of a familiar face in the crowd of hurrying foot-passengers.

I glanced up quickly as a man bustled past. Was I mistaken? I probably had been; but the thin, keen, bearded countenance was very much like that of Sir Charles Blythe. But no. When I looked back after him I saw that his figure was much more bent and his appearance was not half so smart and well groomed as the Count’s friend.

At one moment I felt absolutely positive that the man had really been watching me, and was now endeavouring to escape recognition, yet at the next I saw the absurdity of such a thought. Sir Charles’s face had, I suppose, been impressed upon my memory on the previous evening, and the passer-by merely bore some slight resemblance.

And so I dismissed it from my mind.

A few moments later a man in a frock-coat, probably the jeweller’s manager, opened the door, looked up and down

the street for a few moments, shot an inquisitive glance at me, and then disappeared within.

I found that the clock on the splashboard required winding, and was in the act of doing this when my eyes fell upon a second person who was equally a mystery. This time I felt convinced that I was not mistaken. The fair-moustached young man Henderson went by, but without recognising me.

Did either of the pair recognise the car? If so, what object had they in not acknowledging me?

My suspicions were again aroused. I did not like either of the two men. Were they following my master with some evil intent? In London, and especially in certain cosmopolitan circles, one cannot be too cautious regarding one's acquaintances. They had been slightly too over-dressed and too familiar with the Count to suit me, and I had resolved that if I had ever to drive either of them I would land them in some out-of-the-world hole with a pretended breakdown. The non-motorist is always at the mercy of the chauffeur, and the so-called "breakdowns" are frequently due to the vengeance of the driver, who gets his throttle stuck, or some trouble which sounds equally serious, but which is remedied in one, two, three, or four hours, according to how long the chauffeur decides to detain his victim by the roadside.

I wondered, as I sat ruminating, whether these two men were really "crooks"; and so deep-rooted were my suspicions that I decided, when the Count returned, to drop him a hint that we were being watched.

I am not nervous by any means, and, moreover, I always carry for my own protection a handy little revolver. Yet I admit that at that moment I felt a decidedly uncomfortable feeling creeping over me.

Those men meant mischief. I had detected it in their eyes on the previous night. By some kind of mysterious intuition I became aware that we were in peril.

Almost at that moment the shop door was opened by the manager, and the Count, emerging, crossed to me and said —

“Go into the shop, Ewart, and wait there till I return. I’m just going round to get some money,” and seeing a boy passing, he called him, saying, “Just mind this car for ten minutes, my boy, and I’ll give you half a crown. Never mind the police; if they say anything, tell them I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

The lad, eager to earn a trifle, at once consented, and descending, I entered the shop, the door of which was being still held open for me, while the Count hailed a hansom and drove away.

The shop is one of the finest in Bond Street, as you know. At that moment there were, however, no other customers. The manager politely invited me to be seated, saying—

“His lordship will only be a short time,” and then, standing with his hands behind his back, he commenced to chat with me.

“That’s a very fine car of yours,” he said. “You ought to be able to travel pretty fast, eh?”

“Well, we do, as a matter of fact,” I replied.

Then he went to the door, and looking over the panes of frosted glass, asked what horse-power it was, and a number of other questions with which non-motorists always plague the chauffeur.

Then, returning to me, he remarked what a very nice gentleman his lordship was, adding that he had been a customer on several occasions.

“Have you been long in his service?” he inquired.

“Oh yes,” I replied, determined not to be thought a new hand. “Quite a long time. As you say, he is a very charming man.”

“He’s very wealthy, according to report. I read something about him in the papers the other day—a gift of some thousands to the Hospital Fund.”

This rather surprised me. I never remembered having seen the name of Count Bindo di Ferraris in the papers.

Presently I got up, and wandering about the shop, inspected some of the beautiful jewels in the fine show-cases, many of them ornaments of enormous value. The manager, a pleasant, elderly man, took me round and showed me some of the most beautiful jewellery I had ever seen. Then, excusing himself, he retired to the office beyond the shop, and left me to chat with one of the assistants.

I looked at the clock, and saw that nearly half an hour had elapsed since the Count had left. A constable had looked in and inquired about the car, but I had assured him that in a few minutes we should be off, and begged, as a favour, that it might be allowed to remain until my master’s return.

Another quarter of an hour elapsed, when the door opened, and there entered two respectably dressed men in dark overcoats, one wearing a soft brown felt hat and the other a “bowler.”

They asked to see the manager, and the assistant who had been chatting to me conducted them through the shop to the office beyond. Both men were of middle age and well set up, and as they entered, I saw that a third man, much younger, was with them. He, however, did not come in, but stood in the doorway, idly glancing up and down Bond Street.

Within the office I distinctly heard the manager utter an exclamation of surprise, and then one of the men, in a deep, low voice, seemed to enter into a long explanation.

The elder of the two strangers walked along the shop to the door, and going outside, spoke some words to the man who had accompanied them. On re-entering, he passed me, giving me a sharp glance, and then disappeared again into the office, where, for five minutes or so, he remained closeted with the manager.

Presently the last-named came out, and as he approached me I noticed an entire change in his manner. He was pale, almost to the lips.

“Will you step into my office for one moment?” he asked. “There’s—well, a little matter upon which I want to speak to you.”

This surprised me. What could he mean?

Nevertheless, I consented, and in a few moments found myself in a large, well-lit office with the manager and the two strangers.

The man in the brown felt hat was the first to speak.

“We want to ask you a question or two,” he said. “Do you recognise this?” and he produced a small square photograph of a man upon whose coat was a white ticket bearing a bold number. I started when my eyes fell upon it.

“My master!” I ejaculated.

The portrait was a police photograph! The men were detectives!

The inspector, for such he was, turned to the jeweller’s manager, and regarded him with a significant look.

“It’s a good job we’ve arrested him with the stuff on him,” he remarked, “otherwise you’d never have seen the colour of it again. He’s worked the same dodge in Rome and Berlin, and both times got clear away. I suppose he became a small customer, in order to inspire confidence—eh?”

“Well, he came in this morning, saying that he wished to give his wife a tiara for the anniversary of her wedding, and asked that he might have two on approval, as he was undecided which to choose, and wished her to pick for herself. He left his car and chauffeur here till his return, and took away two worth five thousand pounds each. I, of course, had not the slightest suspicion. Lord Ixwell—the name by which we know him—is reputed everywhere to be one of the richest peers in the kingdom.”

“Yes. But, you see, Detective-Sergeant Rodwell here, chanced to see him come out of the shop, and, recognising him as the jewel-thief we’ve wanted for months past, followed his cab down to Charing Cross Station, and there arrested him and took him to Bow Street.”

I stood utterly dumbfounded at this sudden ending of what I had believed would be an ideal engagement.

“What’s your name?” inquired the inspector.

“George Ewart,” was my answer. “I only entered the Count’s service yesterday.”

“And yet you told me you had been his chauffeur for a long time!” exclaimed the jeweller’s manager.

“Well,” said the elder of the detectives, “we shall arrest you, at any rate. You must come round to Bow Street, and I warn you that any statement you may make will be taken down and used as evidence against you.”

“Arrest me!” I cried. “Why, I haven’t done anything! I’m perfectly innocent. I had no idea that——”

“Well, you have more than an idea now, haven’t you?” laughed the detective. “But come along; we have no time to lose,” and he asked the manager to order a four-wheeled cab.

I remonstrated in indignation, but to no avail.

“What about the car?” I asked anxiously, as we went outside together and stepped into the cab, the third police-officer, who had been on guard outside, holding open the door, while the constable who had been worrying me about the car stood looking on.

“Diplock, you can drive a motor-car,” exclaimed the inspector, turning to the detective at the cab door. “Just bring that round to Bow Street as quick as you can.”

The constable took in the situation at a glance. He saw that I had been arrested, and asked the detectives if they needed any assistance. But the reply was negative, and with the inspector at my side and the sergeant opposite, we

moved off towards Piccadilly, the jeweller's manager having been requested to attend at Bow Street Police Station in an hour, in order to identify the stolen property. By that time the charge would be made out, and we should, the inspector said, be up before the magistrate for a remand before the Court rose.

As we drove along Piccadilly, my heart fell within me. All my dreams of those splendid, well-kept roads in the sunny South, of touring to all the gayest places on the Continent, and seeing all that was to be seen, had been shattered at a single blow. And what a blow!

I had awakened to find myself under arrest as the accomplice of one of the most expert jewel-thieves in Europe!

My companions were not communicative. Why should they have been?

Suddenly I became aware of the fact that we had driven a considerable distance. In my agitated state of mind I had taken no notice of our route, and my captors had, it seemed, endeavoured to take my attention off the direction we had taken.

Collecting my scattered senses, however, I recollected that we had crossed one of the bridges over the Thames, and looking out of the window, I found that we were in a long, open road of private houses, each with a short strip of railed-off garden in front—a South London thoroughfare evidently.

"This isn't the way to Bow Street!" I exclaimed in wonder.

"Well, not exactly the straight way," grinned the inspector. "A roundabout route, let's call it."

I was puzzled. The more so when I recognised a few minutes later that we had come down the Camberwell New Road, and were passing Camberwell Green.

We continued up Denmark Hill until, at the corner where Champion Hill branches off, the inspector called to the cabman to stop, and we all descended, the detective-sergeant paying the fare.

Where were they taking me? I wondered. I asked, but they only laughed, and would vouchsafe no reply.

Together we walked up the quiet, semi-rural Champion Hill, until we reached Green Lane, when at the sharp right angle of the road, as we turned, I saw before me an object which caused me to hold my breath in utter amazement.

The car was standing there, right before me in the lonely suburban road, and in it, seated at the wheel, a man whom I next second recognised as the Count himself! He was evidently awaiting me.

He was wearing a different motor-coat, the car bore a different number, and as I approached I noticed that the coronet and cipher had been obliterated by a dab of paint!

“Come on, Ewart!” cried the Count, jumping down to allow me to take his place at the steering.

I turned to my captors in wonder.

“Yes, away you go, Ewart,” the inspector said, “and good luck to you!”

Without another second’s delay, I sprang upon the car, and while the Count, as he jumped up at my side, shouted good-bye to my captors, I started away towards Lordship Lane and the open country of Surrey.

“Where shall we go?” I inquired breathlessly, utterly amazed at our extraordinary escape.

“Straight on through Sydenham, and then I’ll tell you. The sooner we’re out of this, the better. We’ll run along to Winchester, where I have a little house at Kingsworthy, just outside the city, and where we can lie low comfortably for a bit.”

“But shan’t we be followed by those men?” I asked apprehensively.

“Followed—by them? Oh dear no!” he laughed. “Of course, you don’t understand, Ewart. They all three belong to us. We’ve played a smartish game upon the jeweller, haven’t we? They had to frighten you, of course, because it added a real good touch of truth to the scheme. We ought to be able to slip away across the Channel in a week’s time, at latest. They’ll leave to-night—in search of me!” and he laughed lightly to himself.

“Then they were not detectives?” I exclaimed, utterly staggered by the marvellous ingenuity of the robbery.

“No more than you are, Ewart,” was his reply. “But don’t bother your head about them now. All you’ve got to look after is your driving. Let’s get across to Winchester as quickly as possible. Just here!—sharp to the right and the first to the left takes us into the Guildford road. Then we can move.”

CHAPTER II

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A SENTIMENTAL SWINDLE

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Count Bindo's retreat near Winchester proved to be a small, rather isolated house near Kingsworthy. It stood in its own grounds, surrounded by a high wall, and at the rear was a very fair garage, that had been specially constructed, with inspection-pit and the various appliances.

The house was rather well furnished, but the only servant was a man, who turned out to be none other than the yellow-haired young fellow who had been introduced to me at the Cecil as "Mr. Henderson."

He no longer wore the light fancy vest and smartly-cut clothes, but was in a somewhat shabby suit of black. He smiled grimly as I recognised him, while his master said—

"Got back all right, Henderson—eh?"

"I arrived only ten minutes ago, sir. All was quiet, wasn't it?"

"Absolutely," replied the Count, who then went upstairs, and I saw him no more that evening.

For nearly a fortnight the car remained in the garage. It now bore a different identification-plate, and to kill time, I idled about, wondering when we should start again. It was a strange *ménage*. Count Bindo was a very easy-going cosmopolitan, who treated both Henderson and myself as intimates, inasmuch as we ate at table with him, and smoked together each evening.

We were simply waiting. The papers were, of course, full of the clever theft from Gilling’s, and the police, it appeared, were doing their utmost to track the tricksters—but in vain. The Count, under the name of Mr. Claude Fielding, seemed to be very popular in the neighbourhood, though he discouraged visitors. Indeed, no one came there. He dined, however, at several houses during the second week of his concealment, and seemed to be quite confident of his safety.

At last we left, but not, however, before Sir Charles Blythe had stayed one night with us and made some confidential report to his friend. It being apparent that all was clear, some further alteration was made both in the appearance of the car and in the personal aspect of Count Bindo and myself, after which we started for the Continent by way of Southampton.

We crossed and ran up to Paris, where we stayed at the Ritz. The Count proved a devil-may-care fellow, with plenty of friends in the French capital. When with the latter he treated me as a servant; when alone as a friend.

Whatever the result of the clever piece of trickery in Bond Street, it was quite clear that my employer was in funds, for he spent freely, dined and supped at the expensive restaurants, and thoroughly enjoyed himself with his chums.

We left Paris, and went on the broad good road to Lyons and to Monte Carlo. It was just before Christmas, and the season had, of course, not yet commenced. We stayed at the Hôtel de Paris—the hotel where most men *en garçon* put up—and the car I put into the Garage Meunier.

It was the first time I had seen “Monty,” and it attracted me, as it does every man and woman. Here, too, Bindo di Ferraris seemed to have hosts of friends. He dined at the Grand, the Métropole, or the Riviera Palace, and supped each night at Ciro’s, indulging in a little mild play in the Rooms in the interval between the two meals.

He did not often go out in the car, but frequently went to Nice and Cannes by train. About a fortnight after our arrival, however, we ran, one bright morning, along the lower road by Beaulieu to Nice—bad, by the way, on account of the sharp corners and electric trams—and called at a small hotel in the Boulevard Gambetta.

The Count apparently had an appointment with a tall, dark-haired, extremely good-looking young French girl, with whom he lunched at a small restaurant, and afterwards he walked for an hour on the Promenade, talking with her very earnestly.

She was not more than nineteen—a smart, very *chic* little Parisienne, quietly dressed in black, but in clothes that bore unmistakably the *cachet* of a first-class dressmaker. They took a turn on the Jetée Promenade, and presently returned to the hotel, when the Count told her to go and get a close hat and thick coat, and he would wait for her.

Then, when she had gone, he told me that we were about to take her over to the Bristol at Beaulieu, that great white hotel that lies so sheltered in the most delightful bay of the whole Riviera.

It was a clear, bright December afternoon. The roads were perfect, though dusty as the Corniche always is, and

very soon, with the Count and his lady friend, I swung into the curved drive before the hotel.

“You can go to the garage for an hour or so, Ewart,” my employer said, after they had descended. Therefore I turned the car and went to the huge garage at the rear of the hotel—the garage which every motorist on the Riviera knows so well.

After an hour I re-entered the hotel to look for the Count and receive orders, when I saw, in the great red-carpeted lounge, my employer and the little Parisienne seated with the man whom I knew as Sir Charles Blythe, but who really was one of Count Bindo’s confederates.

We exchanged glances, and his was a meaning one. That some deep and ingenious game was in progress I felt certain, but what it was I had no idea.

Blythe was smartly dressed in a grey flannel suit and white shoes—the costume *de rigueur* on the Riviera—and as he smoked his cigar, easily reclining in the wicker lounge-chair, he presented the complete picture of the English aristocrat “putting in” a month or two for sunshine.

Both men were talking earnestly in French with the dark-eyed little lady, who now and then laughed, or, raising her shoulders, looked from one to the other and protruded her chin in a gesture of uncertainty.

I retired and watched closely. It was quite plain in a few moments that the young lady was entirely devoted to the handsome Bindo. Both manner and glances betrayed it. I saw him look at Blythe, and knew that they were working in accord towards some prearranged end.