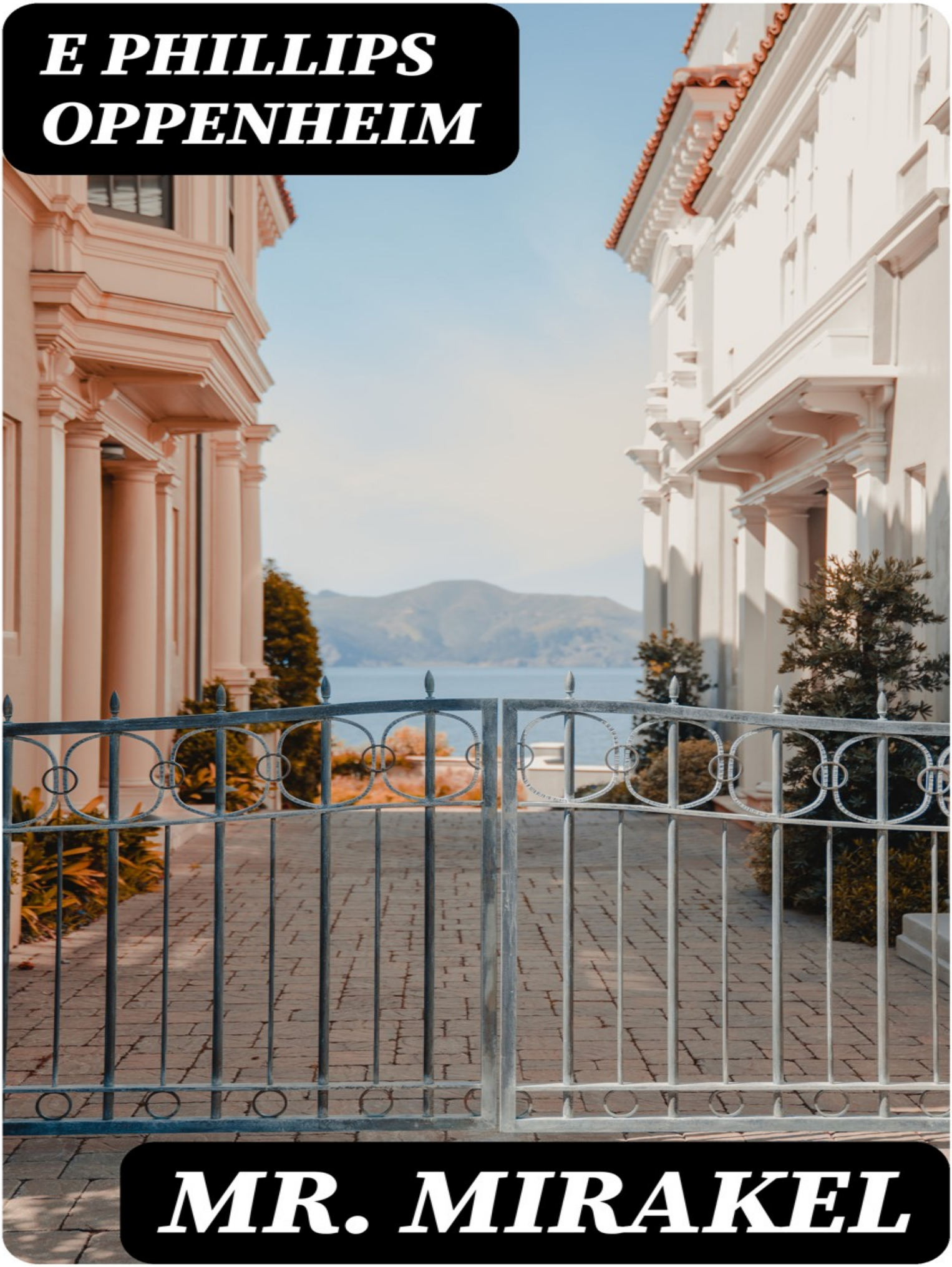
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THE END

PART I

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CHAPTER I

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Mademoiselle was seated at the extreme end of an ornate but crudely fashioned wooden bench very near the corner of the seafront at Cintra. Monsieur had been seated in thoughtful silence a dozen feet away for some time. There came a moment, however, when he rose slowly to his feet and, with a little bow and his hat in his hand, addressed her. It was the first time that the silence had been broken between them. Perhaps that was as well, for they were strangers.

"Mademoiselle," he began.

Mademoiselle half rose to her feet with an indignant little flutter of her skirt and an angry frown. "Mademoiselle will pardon me," he continued, speaking English, but with an accent which pronounced his southern nationality.

"Mademoiselle," she interrupted coldly, "will not be in the humour to pardon anything in the nature of an impertinence."

"That reduces me almost to despair," the young man lamented. "What is there that I can do? Would it be considered too great an impertinence if I were to point out to Mademoiselle that some two or three minutes ago she dropped her purse out of her bag, since when its contents have been slowly filtering their way into the sand? If they

become buried," he continued, looking fixedly at a point very near the toe of his companion's elegant shoe, "and if Mademoiselle does not collect her belongings in a few moments, they will sink into the sand."

Of course, Monsieur had won the silent battle, as she had begun to look upon it, of the last ten minutes. She looked disconsolately down. It was as her neighbour had pointed out. Her small gold purse lay between the chinks of the seat rest, upside-down. There were coins glittering through its interstices, and a little bundle of notes was in a precarious position.

"So that was what you were so uneasy about?" she asked in a slightly milder tone.

"It was," he assented.

"I owe you my apologies and my thanks," she said with very reserved graciousness. "Please allow me to pick these up for myself. I would not dream of troubling you, Monsieur —indeed, I beg of you."

She waved him away and continued to pick up a very considerable sum reckoned in Portuguese money, replacing it carefully, the notes in her bag, the coins in her purse. She shook them down and rose to her feet.

"I thank you very much, Monsieur," she said.

He bowed without a word and waited for her intimated retreat. At the last moment, however, she hesitated. He remained standing, not at all an unpleasant picture of a young man who had been engaged in a purely courteous action.

"I think," she said, "I should offer you an apology. I came out from the Casino feeling the heat very much, in search of

fresh air, and solitude."

"Mademoiselle," he assured her with a pleasant smile, "nothing in the world would have induced me to disturb you but for the fact that I feared you might lose your money more quickly and even more inevitably than inside the building."

"One is not always the loser," she answered, returning his smile. "I myself gain frequently."

"Mademoiselle has the *chance*."

"I wish to offer you my thanks, sir. To whom shall I address them?"

He bowed slightly.

"To Roderigo di Cordovina, Mademoiselle. It is with so much of my name only that I will burden you.

"There is much more?" she enquired with slightly upraised eyebrows.

"Mademoiselle," he answered, "I possess a long list of thoughtless ancestors who, without divining the encumbrance they would be to me, left behind them names of many syllables which even I have learnt to handle with difficulty. Not for anything in the world would I encumber a young lady of such attractions with their memory."

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment. He was quite content to be studied, for with his olive complexion, his deep brown eyes and his very pleasant smile, he was by no means repulsive to look at. Mademoiselle, too, had charm, although for the part of the world in which she found herself she was of somewhat neutral colouring. She nodded thoughtfully.

"You are very good at this sort of thing," she observed.

"Yes?" he asked interrogatively.

"At the bandying of words."

"A forerunner, I trust, of a better acquaintance."

She laughed outright, a healthy Anglo-Saxon girl's laugh, showing flashing white teeth, and a distinct dimple which betrayed a great inclination to take part in the festivities.

"I would beg for some more of your name," she confided, "but you see—your attention is required elsewhere."

She indicated the very correctly attired young messenger in livery who was waiting in the background with a note in his hand, which he at once handed over to the young man. The latter bowed his thanks to the young lady, received the note, tore open the envelope and glanced through its contents. They appeared to afford him a certain amount of satisfaction.

"You will tell the Captain," he directed, handing across to the messenger what seemed to be a magnificent *pourboire*, "that I have received the note and that I shall be there."

The young lady hesitated as she turned away.

"Your news, I trust, is good?" she enquired.

"It would be good," he assured her, "but it is spoilt by your departure."

She shook her head.

"No more," she decided. "You are too glib for me, Monsieur. Thank you for showing me my purse."

"And may I be permitted to hope, perhaps," he added with a little bow, "that we meet again?"

Mademoiselle's expression was by no means forbidding, but she made no reply. She walked towards the Casino and disappeared.

The young man of many names read over his note again, turned towards the line of waiting automobiles, and lifted his finger. In a few minutes he was on his way to Lisbon.

CHAPTER II

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Somewhere about the grim hour of half-past two the following morning, there was a certain amount of commotion in the huge barnlike structure which serves as the departure shed of the Imperial Airways planes in Lisbon. There had been a change in the weather outside; the wind had dropped, the rain had almost ceased. A shrill whistle was heard echoing through that gloomy building from one of the quays. A tall young man in naval uniform hurried down the steps from the pilot's quarters. He carried a few passports in his hand. A little crowd of people was seated round the departure shed, some of them nervously hanging on to their baggage, others drinking tea or coffee which they were able to procure from the stall, a few watching with tired eyes and listening for the signal which so seldom came. The pilot looked round him, shook his head at nearly everyone who approached, handed over their passports to two or three Americans, and also with a little bow and marked signs of respect handed one to the young man of many names who had been seated on the bench at Cintra on the previous afternoon.

"Shall we get away, pilot?" the latter asked.

"Nothing that I can see to prevent it, sir," was the quiet reply. "The wind has gone down and the tide is on the turn

already. We sent your baggage down half an hour ago."

The young man nodded his thanks and lit a cigarette. He was on the point of taking his departure when he felt a touch upon his arm and a familiar voice in his ear. It was a familiar voice, yet he could not remember for the moment where he had heard it before. The slim, tall figure in a warm travelling coat and an impenetrable veil who was addressing him was surely a stranger.

"*Monsieur le Marquis*," she repeated pleadingly.

He suddenly realized the identity of the young woman who stood by his side. Her manner was very much changed, though, since the morning. Her eyes were full of anxiety and the colour had left her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, hat in hand.

"You have been given your passport, you leave by this boat?"

"Yes, I believe so," he answered. "The pilot has just told me to get on board. The note that I had at Cintra was from him."

"Monsieur," she went on, and her voice also seemed to have changed altogether since the morning, "you have priority, of course? You have influence here?"

"Very little," he answered. "Some, perhaps."

"Could you procure for me permission to cross by this flying boat?" she asked eagerly. "I have my ticket, but no priority. Everything is paid for, my baggage is on the seat there. It would be a great and wonderful benefit for me if I could leave Lisbon tonight."

He looked at her in some embarrassment.

"My dear young lady," he remonstrated, "I am afraid that you are asking something which is very difficult. These people have already made out their list, there are nearly always men and women who have been waiting here for many nights. I do not think that the authorities would consent to any alteration in their arrangements."

"You do not know me," she went on. "It is a great humiliation that I should have to plead like this. I ask the greatest favour of my life from a stranger. Yet believe me, I am not exaggerating when I tell you that if I remain, it is to face great inconvenience if not danger."

"That sounds rather serious, Mademoiselle," he observed gravely.

"I use the word advisedly," she assured him. "I am in danger here. I wish I could make you understand how wonderful it would be for me to feel the sea beneath my feet, to be passing away from this passion-riven Continent, to safety in England."

He looked at her curiously.

"England is not supposed to be the safest place in the world just now," he reminded her.

"Safety!" she said wearily. "It is a matter of the soul, not of the body. Monsieur le Marquis, we may never meet again, but if you do this for me I shall think of you with deep gratitude for the rest of my life. You will be doing a marvellous kindness to a stranger, but you will be doing it for one who will never forget."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"One moment," he begged.

He moved across to the pilot, drew him on one side, and for a few moments talked rapidly. The pilot at first shook his head; then he listened more intently and his manner changed. He hesitated for a few minutes and finally, covering it with a loose sheet of paper, he handed over a passport.

"To tell you the truth, Marquis," he said, "I think that the young lady is quite right in wanting to get out of this country. Will you have the kindness to hand her this passport? Forget that I gave it to you, if you can. It is in your hands—after that, I know nothing. If there is trouble it will figure as the mistake of a clerk. Forget that you have done this, as I shall forget."

The Marquis shook him by the hand. For some reason or other he felt curiously elated at the success of his mission. The pilot made a hasty retreat and disappeared up the steps into his office.

Roderigo di Cordovina drew the anxiously waiting girl a little on one side, concealing the passport, which had been the object of many jealous glances.

"Mademoiselle," he announced, "I have done as you asked. There is your passport. I do not know your name. Until we have passed out of the country it would be just as well perhaps if you do not tell it to me. The handling of passports just now is a curiously indirect and difficult thing. I have made myself responsible for the young man who has granted the favour. I trust you that it will not be abused. For myself, I take any risks there may be cheerfully, even the risk of your being a dangerous criminal!" he added with a

smile. "But if the young man should lose his post through this indiscretion, I should be deeply concerned."

Perhaps it was as well for the girl that there was a screaming whistle from the end of the quay just at that moment which reverberated through the huge waiting room. Light truckloads of luggage were wheeled out on to the wooden quay. Everyone was pushing and scrambling to get down to the boat. The two were separated in the crowd. A manservant addressed the young man and showed him the way.

* * *

From the depths of his comfortable seat in the salon, Roderigo di Cordovina pushed on one side the mass of light novels and newspapers he had collected for the journey, and devoted himself for some time to speculation as to the reasons for the sudden change in this young woman, by whom he frankly admitted that he was very much interested. The change in her bearing and deportment, from the few minutes he had spent with her in Cintra to this unexpected meeting in the departure shed of the Airways, was astonishing in its completeness and almost sinister suggestions. She had shown not the slightest signs of encouraging him in any way at Cintra; she had even discouraged the quite harmless overtures towards a certain amount of friendliness which he had made on the *plage*. During that brief period she had impressed him as being self-reliant, dignified and distinguished. A few hours later in the Airways shed, in the cold and gloom of that miserable morning, she was a changed being. Something seemed to have happened which had brought fear into her life. At

Cintra she was self-possessed and full of poise. In those few moments at Lisbon, especially during her almost frantic appeal to him, she was an entirely changed person. She had not even volunteered her name in acknowledgment of the service he had undoubtedly rendered her. She had drawn the cover even tighter over her passport, to aid in concealing her identity from him.

He summoned the steward as he passed and ordered a drink.

"I suppose you have a different division of the boat for ladies?" he asked.

"Not entirely, sir," the man replied. "But they have a very pleasant little drawing-room the other side of the lounge."

"Did you notice a young lady who came on alone just before or just after me?" Roderigo enquired. "She was wearing a long coat and carrying a small dressing case and handbag."

"I think I know the young lady you mean, sir. She had a berth made up directly she arrived and she has been lying down ever since."

The traveller hesitated for a moment and struggled with the temptation to ask the question which the other's ready tongue suggested. Fortunately for his self-respect the steward anticipated him.

"I do not know her name, sir," he went on. "I do not think she is on the list for this morning at all. The pilot must have passed her at the last moment. There is a place for a label on her dressing case, but it is empty."

"She seems all right, I hope."

"Can't say, sir. She disappeared in the ladies' quarters, and I did hear the young woman who looks after them there say that she threw herself down on the couch and she hasn't opened her eyes or spoken since."

The young man nodded and waved the steward away. Then he stretched himself out comfortably, piled up his cushions, drank his whisky-and-soda—a drink to which at that time in the morning he was a little unaccustomed—and slept until he heard the rattle of coffee cups. He made a hasty toilet, drank some coffee, and enjoyed some delightfully furtive peeps at Poole Harbour on a sunny morning. For the first time he allowed himself to think of his mysterious fellow passenger. He drew a card from his case and scribbled a line on the back of it.

"I do hope you have had a pleasant rest and are glad to arrive in England."

He signed it with his initials and called the steward.

"Could you get that card sent to the young lady we were speaking of?" he asked.

"Of course I could, sir. She is just having some coffee," he replied.

Their progress down the harbour was unexpectedly rapid. They arrived at their destination half an hour later.

Roderigo lined up to disembark. He touched the steward on the arm as he slipped him his *pourboire*.

"You found the young lady and gave her the card?" he enquired.

"She had it within two minutes of your giving it to me, sir. I am very much obliged to you, I am sure, sir. Thank you."

"She seemed all right this morning?"

"Perfectly, sir. I did hear her say that she was not hurrying off."

Roderigo after that delayed no more. He was through the customs in a quarter of an hour. A few minutes later he was seated in the train to London. He had not had another glimpse of his provocative acquaintance.

CHAPTER III

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Roderigo di Cordovina spent the first week or ten days of his stay in London very much in the usual style of the young foreigner of birth and breeding. He commenced by removing himself from the large hotel in which he had engaged rooms and selected a small suite in a block of flats not far from Berkeley Square. Afterwards he devoted the mornings to visiting tailors, hosiers, bootmakers, and other establishments patronized by the fashionable youth of Europe. His afternoons were devoted to visits of ceremony. He left cards upon a few personal friends and connections of his family, upon the various Legations and Embassies still existing, and finally gave his attention to introductions to London clubs with which he had been entrusted by various members of his somewhat large circle of friends. On the tenth day after his arrival he found himself amidst the pillared ways of a club somewhere in the West End of London, gazing listlessly at a few pictures, all of which, being a young man of considerable taste and culture, he found terrible. In due course, he presented himself to the Secretary, who was seated in solitary state in his office

engaged in an apathetic study of the *Times*. The Secretary had once occupied the chair of Archaeology at a well-known university; but now was temporarily invalided out of his position, and a thoroughly bad-tempered man. He surveyed Roderigo's card through horn-rimmed eyeglasses, transferred his regard to his visitor personally with a great deal of silent disapproval in his manner, and motioned him to a chair.

"I am afraid, Marquis," he warned him, "that there is very little we can do just now to render your stay in London agreeable."

"I could scarcely hope for anything of the sort under the somewhat unfortunate circumstances," was the understanding reply.

The visitor's voice was so pleasant and his manners so easy and distinguished that the other made an attempt at civility.

"For anything that we can do, however, we are at your disposal," he said. "We are short-staffed, our chef has deserted us, our wine committee have failed in their duties and our cellar is nearly empty. We have discontinued the habit of letting bedrooms, and I am afraid that the majority of our members who are left here and whom you may still come across will scarcely be men with whom you will find much in common."

Roderigo waved his hand.

"At a time like this," he admitted, "I expected nothing. Having a card addressed to a club of such distinction, however, I felt it agreeable to present myself for a few moments."

"You are very welcome, of course," the Secretary assured him. "Your name shall be properly entered in the book."

"Mine is an unhappy-looking country just now," the Marquis confided. "Lisbon has become simply a dumping place for spies, tourists, diplomats looking for a job, and armament contractors. It is filled with crowds of very busy men who have just arrived from somewhere or who are just going somewhere else, and who wish to confide the nature of their business to every listener within hearing. It is simply intolerable. My own estates are filled with uninvited and unwanted evacués from what is after all a foreign country. You perceive, sir, that I am not a philanthropist."

The Secretary stroked his chin.

"The idea was beginning to dawn upon me," he admitted.

"I am paying a short visit here," the other explained, "entirely on impulse. It occurred to me that your country might be in a sense interesting at this time when, magnificently assured as is his reputation for a phlegmatic disposition, the Briton is finding himself a little—shall I say 'pushed,' 'awakened'? The same impulse may drive me, if the opportunity occurs, to wander even farther afield across the Atlantic."

"You will find it exceedingly difficult," the Secretary warned him drily. "The Atlantic to-day is made over to mankind with a purpose. You, I gather, scarcely come under that heading."

Roderigo was dubious.

"I have a purpose," he protested, "but it is simply to rediscover myself in all this new tumult."

"What has it got to do with you?" the Secretary asked a little bluntly.

The eyebrows of his visitor were slightly raised.

"I am perhaps properly reproved," the latter admitted. "It has nothing to do with me. My remark was sheer egoism. There is no reason why I should rediscover myself. I am just as well hopelessly lost like millions of others here in this island and all over the Continent. I thank you for your courtesy, sir. I shall spend a short time, if I may, inspecting your library."

He left the room with a little bow. The Secretary glared after him. Both were suffering from a mutual and perfectly reasonable dislike of the other's outlook.

"What the hell use is a Portuguese Marquis to the Parthenon Club?" was the Secretary's reaction.

"Why ever do they need a savage to keep strangers out of a club like this?" Roderigo muttered to himself as he went out and commenced a long and vain quest for a bar. He finally confided the nature of the quest upon which he was engaged to an elderly waiter of sad but benevolent aspect, who resembled more than anything else a high dignitary of the Church.

"If you wish for a cup of tea, sir, I can send it to you in either of the rooms on the left there, or in the lounge," the visitor was told.

"But I do not wish for a cup of tea," was the rueful reply. "I should like a drink of a more refreshing character."

"Alcohol is seldom served in the Club before the official hours, sir," the man ventured. "May I ask whether you are a visitor?"

"Your club," Roderigo confided, "is affiliated with one of which I have been a member since I left the University of Lisbon."

"I have always understood, sir," the man observed, "that habits on the Continent are very different from ours. We shall do our best to accommodate you, of course."

"I will have a whisky-and-soda in here," Roderigo decided, sinking into a well-worn but capacious easy chair. "And look here, my friend," he added, "would you mind telling me why you have such an expression of surprise upon your face?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I am sure," the man replied. "I was surprised, I must confess, to hear a gentleman who has —forgive me, sir—every appearance of being a foreigner, speak English so perfectly."

"You flatter me," Roderigo observed, reaching out for a newspaper. "But for the unfortunate fact that in a moment of madness I volunteered for that Spanish insurrectionary war and commanded a troop of cavalry during the process of their becoming mechanized, I might have been at the present moment Professor of English at our principal university. I unfortunately lost some portion of my boyish health and an inch or two off my leg in that campaign."

The major-domo, for so he was always called at the Club, backed away and routed out an inferior domestic to procure and serve the whisky-and-soda. He was not a person with a great sense of humour and he had an entirely ill-founded idea that this unusual visitor was secretly amusing himself at his expense. Roderigo, however, was doing nothing of the sort. He was feeling very much depressed and already half

convinced that this excursion of his to England had never been a necessity and was altogether a mad affair. He decided when he had drunk a portion of his whisky-and-soda and lit one of his endless cigarettes that he would try something more frivolous in the way of entertainment to pass the remainder of the day. He selected from a roll of cards which had arrived by that morning's post, and which he had tied together and thrust into his overcoat pocket, an invitation to a cocktail party to be given by the Portuguese Ambassador at his own Embassy. As the latter, the Baron Fernando di Gomez by name, was a widower and depended upon a niece from the family of the di Cordovinas to act as hostess for him, Roderigo, who knew the young lady very well indeed, decided that in Manderley House he would stand a better chance of escaping from his depression. Whether he did a wise thing when he bade adieu to the gloomy shadows of the Parthenon Club and departed for the Portuguese Embassy was a subject upon which he speculated many times during the next few months. It was in any case a memorable decision.

Roderigo drove up to Manderley House about half an hour later, handed his stick and gloves to an attendant footman, greeted the major-domo of the household, who was an old acquaintance, with a pleasant smile, and was led into the reception room upstairs from which the sound of many cheerful young voices and the tinkling of many shakers was at least exhilarating. He heard his name announced with full and sonorous emphasis. A small dark young lady, of sparkling and vivacious appearance, threw her shapely little arms into the air and abandoned all

ceremony at his entrance. It was all she could do to refrain from embracing him, and they stood together hand in hand for several moments without anything particularly intelligent happening in the way of conversation. At last, however, the Princess Rosina became coherent.

"Roderigo, my cousin!" she exclaimed, introducing him as it were to the whole of her little circle with a wave of the hand. "My beloved! How wonderful to see you over here in this gloomy city. But why, why in the name of all that is wonderful do you come? Except that I think something must have told you that my heart was aching to hear your voice, I can think of no other reason for your visit."

"I can at least confess, dear Rosina," he answered, "that it was my heart which made me come. I suspected it at the time. The sound of your voice as I climbed your beautiful staircase convinced me."

"But the true reason," she demanded, with an impatient little stamp of her tiny foot. "The true reason! Why are you here?"

"Rosina," he whispered earnestly, "I ask myself that with every breath I draw. I do not know. There is no answer. All that I can tell you is that I was driven out of Lisbon by a multitude of wild people. I had to escape. It was here or South America. I chose here. I know now that I was right."

"You were very, very wrong," she assured him, "from your own point of view. The only person whom you will make happy here is myself. I am very lonely, Roderigo. But in Buenos Aires they are gay. In Rio also. The whole of the Southern Hemisphere is happy. Here they are—what shall I say?—grim. It is not that they are afraid, they have the

courage of lions, but the shadow hangs over them. They have fear. What shall we do with you, dear cousin, now that we have you?"

"Give me a cocktail to start with, please," he begged.

She took him by the arm and led him to a pleasant little corner of the room. All the time introductions of an informal type flowed from her lips. Roderigo found himself bowing to the right and to the left at every step. In the end they made a joke of it. Everyone seemed to understand the gay little Princess and her ways, and gradually they reached a quiet retired spot where there were very few people, and a footman who had assiduously followed them presented a tray laden with glasses.

"We will not sit down," she said, "because you will have to be leaping up again all the time with those charming manners of yours. We will drink to one another. Here you will find real lemons for your Martini, lemons which they tell me have been stripped away from our own dear land. I have you here, Roderigo, but I do not feel that you are real unless I hold your arm all the time. I feel that you will slip away. Do not dare to leave without seeing me again and making a rendezvous. You dine with us, when? To-morrow, perhaps?"

"To-morrow with joy," he answered. "About ten?"

"Remember," she laughed, "that you are no longer in the country of civilization. We dine here about half-past eight, and the English think *that* late. Never mind—their food is good, all their game is wonderful, and we have our own chef. Fernando will be crazy to see you, and I know perfectly well what his advice to you will be; but since I married Fernando's First Secretary and became the wife of a budding

diplomat, I never tell anybody anything. I will introduce you to some beautiful women later on—but not for keeps, none of them, mind! I flit away now for a moment," she went on after receiving a message from the dignitary who had welcomed Roderigo. "I have a guest arrived, I know by Antonio's face, who must be welcomed. Royalty," she whispered, dropping her voice. "But see how soon I shall return."

Roderigo settled himself down in a high-backed chair, watched with admiration his young relative's graceful curtsy, and also suffered his glass to be replenished by the assiduous young footman. Life had seemed serious enough only a fortnight ago when he had suddenly decided to leave Portugal, but it was all very different now. He was very much a schoolboy at heart, and those vague apprehensions which had troubled him, the loneliness he was beginning to feel after that departure from his own country estates, the black depression of Lisbon, the dubious forebodings even of his own countrypeople, everything had been growing intolerable. This was the first caste of real light-hearted living he had seen or experienced for months. He welcomed a few minutes' conversation with the librarian and the treasurer of the establishment who, hearing of his arrival, came up to greet him, and he enjoyed once more the sound of his own tongue carefully and correctly spoken.

The librarian, whose name also was Gomez and who was a distant relative of the Minister, drew him on one side for a moment.

"I was asked, if I could, to find you at once, Marquis," he said. "You remember without a doubt Manuel di Gomez?"