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***AARON
RODD,
DIVINER***

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Chapter I The Cunning of Harvey Grimm

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A queer, unexpected streak of sunshine, which by some miracle had found its way through a pall of clouds and a low-hanging mist, suddenly fell as though exhausted across the asphalt path of the Embankment Gardens. A tall, gaunt young man, who had been seated with folded arms in the corner of one of the seats, stared at it as though bewildered. His eyes suddenly met those of a young lady in deep black, who was gazing about her in similar stupefaction. Almost at once, and with perfect spontaneity, she smiled upon him.

"But it is astonishing, this!" she exclaimed. "Sunshine in London—in January!"

The young man was a little confused. He was very diffident, and such lack of conventionality on the part of a perfect stranger surprised him.

"It is unusual," he admitted.

"It is a thing which I have never seen," she went on, dropping voice a little and glancing towards a bath-chair close at hand, in which an elderly and very delicate-looking old gentleman was muffled up in furs and apparently asleep. "It is something, even, for which I had not dared to hope. We seem so far here from everything that is bright and beautiful and cheerful."

Aaron Rodd, who was a shy and awkward being, felt unexpectedly at his ease. He was even anxious for further conversation. He had a rather long, pale face, with deep-set eyes and rugged features. He was soberly, even sombrely

dressed in dismal black. He had the air of a recluse. Perhaps that was why the young lady smiled upon him with such confidence.

"You are not English?" he ventured.

She shook her head.

"What we are now, alas!" she sighed, glancing towards the bath-chair, "I scarcely know, for we have no country. Like every one else in such a plight, we come to England."

"It is your father who sleeps there?" he enquired.

"It is my grandfather," she told him. "Together—he and I and my brother—we have passed through terrible times. He has lost all power to sleep at night. In the daytime, when it does not rain, he is wheeled out here, and, if it is only not too cold, then he sleeps as he does now, and I watch."

"You are very young to have charge of him."

She smiled a little pitifully.

"One grows old so quickly in these terrible days! I am already twenty-one. But you," she went on—"see how inquisitive I am!—I saw you yesterday from the distance, seated here. There are nursemaids and queer fragments of humanity who seem to pass through these gardens and loiter, and sometimes there are those with affairs who go on their way. But you—what do you think of as you sit there? You are a writer, perhaps?"

He laughed a little harshly. His voice was not altogether pleasant.

"I am a lawyer," he declared, "without a practice. Sometimes the ghosts who call at my empty office stifle me and I come out here to escape from them."

"A lawyer? An *avocat*?" she repeated softly to herself.

Evidently she found something to interest her in the statement. She glanced towards the sleeping man. Then she came a little nearer. He was conscious of a very delightful and altogether un-English perfume, aware suddenly that her eyes were the colour of violets, framed underneath with deep but not unbecoming lines, that her mouth was curved in a fashion strange to him.

"Englishmen, they say, are so much to be trusted," she murmured, "and a lawyer, too..."

"I am an American by birth," he interposed, "although I have lived over here nearly all my life."

"It is the same thing. We need advice so badly. Let me ask you one question. Is it not the first principle of a lawyer to hold sacred whatever confidence his client may confide in him?"

"Absolutely," he assured her.

"Even if that confidence," she persisted, "should bring the person who offered it within the hold of the law?"

"A lawyer may refuse a client," he said, "but he may never betray his confidence."

"Will you tell me your name and address?" she asked eagerly.

"My name is Aaron Rodd," he told her. "My address is number seventeen, Manchester Street, Adelphi, and my office is on the third floor."

"Mr. Aaron Rodd," she repeated, with a queer little foreign intonation. "That is a strange name and I shall remember it. When might one visit you, monsieur? At three o'clock this afternoon?"

"I shall be in all day."

"Then au revoir!" she exclaimed, with an abrupt gesture of farewell.

The old gentleman had opened his eyes and was gazing fretfully about. She crossed the asphalt walk swiftly towards him. An attendant, who seemed to have gone to sleep standing on one leg; gripped the handle of the bath-chair. The girl passed her arm around the old man's shoulders and whispered something to the attendant. They passed away together. The little streak of sunshine had gone. Aaron Rodd thrust his ungloved hands into his coat pockets and made his way in the opposite direction....

About an hour later, a small, rubicund man, a man whose dark hair was turning grey, but whose eyes were bright and whose complexion was remarkably healthy, paused before the door-plate of an office building in one of the back streets leading from the Adelphi. He was dressed with extreme neatness, from the tips of his patent boots to his grey felt hat, and he was obviously of a cheerful disposition. He glanced down the list of names, twirling his cane in light-hearted fashion and whistling softly to himself. Suddenly he paused. His cane ceased its aimless configurations and rested for a moment upon a name about half-way down the list, the name of Mr. Aaron Rodd, Solicitor and Commissioner for Oaths. There was also an indication that Mr. Rodd's offices were to be found upon the third floor. His prospective visitor glanced around, and, discovering that there was no lift, started out for the stone stairs. On the first landing he encountered a small boy, descending with a roll of papers under his arm. Him the new-comer, whose name was Mr. Harvey Grimm, promptly addressed.

"My young sir," he said pleasantly, "from the red tape around that bundle of papers which you are carrying, I gather that you have legal connections. You are probably the confidential clerk of the gentleman whom I am proposing to visit. Can you tell me, before I attempt another flight of these very dusty and unsympathetic steps, whether Mr. Aaron Rodd is within?"

The boy glanced at his questioner suspiciously.

"I am not in Mr. Rodd's office," he replied. "I'm Steel and Agnett, second floor."

"That," Mr. Harvey Grimm sighed regretfully, "is unfortunate. A very excellent firm yours, my boy. Do not let me any longer interfere with your efforts on their behalf."

Aaron Rodd's prospective visitor, with a sigh, recommenced the ascent. The boy looked after him for a moment dubiously and then disappeared. Arrived at the third floor, at the extreme end of the corridor the former discovered a door, on which was painted the name of *Mr. Aaron Rodd*. He knocked, was bidden to enter, and stepped at once into a single, bald and unpromising-looking apartment.

"Good morning, Aaron!" he said cheerfully, closing the door behind him and advancing across the dusty floor.

Aaron Rodd, who had been seated before a desk, apparently immersed in a legal document, first raised his head and then rose slowly to his feet. His first look of expectancy, as he had turned towards his visitor, faded by degrees into a very curious expression, an expression which seemed made up of a great deal of amazement and a

certain amount of dread. With his left hand he gripped the side of the desk.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "It's Ned——"

His visitor held out his hand.

"No, no, my dear Aaron," he interrupted firmly, "you are deceived by a slight resemblance. You are thinking, probably, of that poor fellow Ned Stiles. You will never see Ned again, Aaron."

The intelligence appeared to cause the listener no grief. Neither did it carry with it any conviction.

"Harvey Grimm is my name," the new-comer went on, "Mr. Harvey Grimm, if you please, of Chicago. You remember me now, without a doubt?"

He extended his hand confidently. His smile was ingratiating, his air that of an ingenuous child anxious for a favourable reception. Aaron Rodd slowly thrust out his ink-stained fingers.

"I remember you all right," he admitted.

The visitor, having established his identity, seemed disposed to abandon the subject. He glanced around the room, and, discovering a cane-bottomed chair on which were piled some dust-covered documents, he calmly swept them away, annexed the chair, which he carefully flicked around with a silk handkerchief, and brought it to the side of the desk.

"Sit down, my dear fellow, I beg you," he invited, laying his hat on the floor by his side, hitching up his blue serge trousers and smiling in momentary satisfaction at his well-polished shoes. "I have appropriated, I fancy, the client's

chair. Am I right, I wonder, in presuming that there has not been much use for it lately?"

"Perfectly right," was the grim reply.

"Hard times these have been for all of us," Harvey Grimm declared, with an air of placid satisfaction. "You are not expecting a client this morning, I presume?"

"Nor a miracle."

"In that case I will smoke," the new-comer continued, producing a small, gold case, selecting a cigarette and lighting it. "Try one."

Aaron Rodd hesitated and finally accepted the offer. He smoked with the air of one unused to the indulgence.

"Mr. Harvey Grimm of Chicago," he muttered, studying his visitor's very immaculate appearance. "Haven't I heard the name somewhere, or seen it in the papers lately?"

"Possibly," was the suave reply. "My arrival in London has, I think, created some slight interest. Even your press, I find, is not above recording the movements of a capitalist."

"A what?"

"A capitalist," Harvey Grimm repeated calmly. "With a name like mine, and an abode like Chicago, I am amazed that you did not divine it."

"Seven years ago," Aaron Rodd observed, "we divided seventeen pounds, four shillings and eightpence. It was, I believe, our united capital."

"And to judge by your surroundings," his companion sighed, "I fear, my friend, that you have been emulating the man who tied up his talent in a stocking. I, on the other hand——"

"Have changed your name and become a capitalist," Aaron Rodd interrupted drily.

"Precisely!"

There was a moment's silence. Mr. Harvey Grimm, with the beatific smile of opulence, was whistling softly to himself. His companion's thoughts had apparently travelled back into the past.

"Well," the latter said at last, "I will imitate your candour. The document I was examining with so much interest when you came in, is a seven-year-old lease, long since cancelled. The few black boxes you see around the room are, with one exception, bogus. I sit here from morning till night and nothing happens. I sit here and brood."

"Dear me! Dear me!" his visitor murmured sympathetically.

"By turning my chair around," Aaron Rodd continued, "I can just catch a glimpse of the river across the Gardens there. I sit and watch, wonder whether a tug will go past next or a lighter, watch the people in the gardens, wonder where they are going, why they are loitering, why hurrying. I speculate about the few passers-by down in the street there. Sometimes I close my eyes and I fancy myself in Lincoln's Inn, seated in a padded morocco chair, with a Turkey-carpet on the floor, and rows of boxes, black tin boxes, with wonderful names inscribed upon them in white lettering, reaching to the ceiling, and my secretary poring over my engagement book, wondering when it would be possible for me to squeeze in half an hour for an important client."

"Too much of the dreamer about you," Harvey Grimm pronounced. "Perhaps, after all, it is the fault of your work. It's a sedative profession, you know, Aaron. It wouldn't suit me to have to sit and wait for clients."

"It's the black bogey of my life," the other assented, with a thin note of passion in his tone. "If only one could get out and work, even if one didn't get a penny for it!"

"And financially?" Harvey Grimm enquired, with an apologetic cough.

"On the rocks," was the bitter reply. "You can understand," he went on, with a heedless sarcasm, "what a wonderful thing it is for me to welcome a capitalist in my shabby office."

"And an old friend," was the cheerful reminder. "Come, come, Aaron, we must look into this. I must place some of my affairs in your charge."

Aaron Rodd's lip curled with bitter incredulity.

"Some of your affairs! I had a taste of those in the old days, Ned—I mean Harvey. You brought me to the brink of Sing-Sing, you drove me over here to make a fresh start."

Harvey Grimm waved his hand. These reminiscences were indelicate.

"My dear fellow!" he protested. "Now come, answer me a few questions. Such affairs of business as have fallen to your lot have been conducted with—er—discretion?"

"If you mean have I preserved my reputation," the lawyer replied grimly, "I have. I have no temptation to do otherwise."

"That is capital," his friend declared. "That helps us at once. And now, I think," he went on, glancing at his neat

little wristwatch, "lunch."

Aaron Rodd's first movement was almost eager. He checked himself, however. Then a glance at his visitor's immaculate toilet and distinctly opulent appearance reassured him.

"There will be no trouble, I presume," he said a little diffidently, "as to the settlement of our bill? I warn you before we start that a shilling and a few coppers——"

Harvey Grimm laid his hand almost affectionately upon the other's shoulder.

"My dear Aaron," he expostulated, "you are a little confused. You have not yet taken in the position. A capitalist is, of course, a relative term. I will not press that point. But let me assure you that I have a suite of rooms at the Milan, ample credit for any meals I choose to take there, even money to pay for them, if necessary."

"I am not fit to go to the Milan," Aaron Rodd muttered, brushing himself vigorously.

"That is entirely your mistake," his friend replied, rising to his feet and lighting another cigarette. "A judicious shabbiness is to-day an approved form of eccentricity. With your ascetic face, my dear Aaron, that little wisp of black tie, your clean but frayed collar, your sombre, well-worn clothes, you would be mistaken by the casual observer for either a Chancery lawyer with an indifferent housekeeper, or a writer of dramatic blank verse, which every one admires but no one buys. Reassure yourself, Aaron. I predict that as a companion you will do me every credit."

For the first time a grim, hard smile parted the lips of the man who was making out with rather weary fingers the

accustomed card to affix to his door.

"The needy adventurer is what I feel like in these days," he observed.

"And why not adventurer?" Harvey Grimm protested, as they descended the stone steps. "We are all needy, that is to say we all need something or other, and we all—those of us who understand life, at any rate—seek adventures. Even with the success I have myself attained—I will be quite frank with you, my dear Aaron—I am entirely unchanged. I can assure you that I am not above finding interest and pleasure, as well as profit, in any adventure which may come to hand."

His companion chuckled drily.

"I can well believe it," he murmured.

They strolled up the street, a somewhat curiously assorted couple. Mr. Harvey Grimm's grey felt hat, his neat and somewhat jaunty figure, rather suggested the successful trainer of careful habits, or elderly jockey enjoying the opulence of middle age. Aaron Rodd, on the other hand, looked exactly what he was—the lean and hungry professional man with whom the times have gone ill.

"Queer neighbourhood, this, you've chosen for your office, Aaron," his friend remarked, pausing as they neared the corner. "What sort of people come into these parts, anyway?"

"It's just a backwater. There's the broad stream of London flowing on to success and prosperity a few yards up the hill. If you listen for a moment you can hear it. These little streets are just parasitical branches, still alive and still struggling, but fit for nothing but to be snapped off. All the

furtive businesses in the world might be conducted behind these silent, unwashed windows and blank doorways—shabby theatrical agencies, doubtful publications, betting offices of poor reputation. People come here to hide or to escape notice. There was a murder committed down by the railings at the end of the street, only a year or so ago."

"Obviously," Harvey Grimm remarked cheerfully, "the region of melancholia and tragedies. We must see how things go, Aaron. Perhaps, later on, it would be as well for you to move to a better-known part. Just at present, however, it is well enough."

The tall young man looked down at his companion half derisively, half eagerly. He knew him too well to ask many questions, knew him too well to hope unduly, knew, too, the danger into which this simple luncheon might lead him. Yet only a few nights ago he had thought of the river! It was better to take luncheon with Harvey Grimm at the Milan than to feel the black waters sucking his breath away!

"Feeling better, Aaron?" Harvey Grimm enquired of his friend, about an hour and a half later.

Aaron Rodd was both feeling and looking better and acknowledged the fact. His manner towards his host, too, showed signs of a subtle change. The latter was obviously *persona grata* in the restaurant. Their table, although a little retired, was in a coveted corner, and attentions of every sort had been respectfully offered them. Nevertheless, his guest felt some sense of relief when he saw the bill signed with a little flourish and accepted with a low bow by their waiter.

Harvey Grimm leaned back in his chair and removed the cigar for a moment from his lips.

"You've no faith in me, Aaron," he declared, with an encouraging smile. "That's what you always lacked, even in the old days—faith. You're losing touch with the world, you know, cooped up in that musty office of yours. You don't expect anything to happen to you so long as you grub away there, do you?"

"Nothing has happened, at any rate," Aaron Rodd admitted.

"I will not say that it is your fault," his companion continued tolerantly. "You are by nature of a meditative and retiring temperament. It is a piece of extraordinarily good fortune for you that I never forget old friends."

"Have you anything to propose to me?" Aaron Rodd asked bluntly.

His host leaned across the table.

"Always so downright, my dear Aaron," he murmured, "so material! However, you have asked the question and here is my answer. I am proposing to remain in London for some little time. There are various schemes which have suggested themselves to me, which might readily lead to an enlargement of my income. For their prosecution, my dear Aaron, I need one, only one companion whom I can trust, one man who is out for the big things. That is why I come to you. I offer you a partnership in the concern—Harvey Grimm and Rodd, Traffickers in Fate, Dealers in Adventures. How your hand shakes, man! There, you've dropped the ash from your cigar!"

Aaron Rodd's thin lips were quivering. His eyes seemed full of unutterable things.

"I have made such a fight of it," he muttered. "You've got me, though, Harvey. I've eaten my last crust. I should have had to sell my office stool for a meal to-morrow."

His friend shook his head genially.

"My dear Aaron," he protested, "such a confession from a man of brains, when one considers how the world is overrun with fools, is a terrible one."

"One has a conscience," Rodd sighed, "and a profession like mine doesn't lend itself to crooked dealing."

Harvey Grimm smiled tolerantly. He had the air of one listening to a child.

"The wolves of the world," he said, "keep their conscience, and as regards wrong-doing, it's just success that makes the difference.... My dear fellow!" he broke off, looking up into the face of a man who had paused at their table and whose hand was now reposing heavily upon his shoulder. "My dear Brodie, this is most opportune. Let me present you to my friend, Mr. Aaron Rodd. Aaron, this is Mr. Brodie—in the language of the cinemas," he added, dropping his voice a little and leaning forward, "the sleuthhound of Europe, the greatest living detective."

Aaron Rodd sat for a moment motionless, the cigar slipped from his fingers on to the plate. All his new hopes seemed crumbling away. His eyes were fixed upon the hand which gripped his companion's shoulder. Harvey Grimm began to laugh softly.

"Cheer up, my pessimistic friend!" he exclaimed. "This isn't the grip of the law which is upon my shoulder. Mr.

Brodie and I are friends—I might even say allies."

Aaron Rodd recovered himself and murmured a few words of mechanical greeting. The new-comer meanwhile took the chair which the waiter had offered him. He was a tall, burly man, clean-shaven, with steely grey eyes, and grey hair brushed back from his forehead. His manner was consequential, his tone patronising.

"So this is our third hand, eh?"

"Guessed it in one with your usual astuteness," Harvey Grimm acknowledged cheerfully. "A lawyer of unblemished character, not momentarily affluent, with the principles of a latitudinarian."

"Has he got the nerve?" Mr. Brodie demanded. "If we are on the right track, there's no room for weaklings in the job."

"Aaron Rodd's all right," his friend declared confidently. "You leave that to me. I'll answer for him."

The younger man leaned across the table.

"Do I understand," he enquired, "that our enterprise is on the side of the law?"

Harvey Grimm smiled.

"The present one, my dear Aaron. I should explain to you, perhaps, that Mr. Brodie is not officially attached either to Scotland Yard or to Police Headquarters in New York. He spent some years at Scotland Yard and, having the good luck to inherit a small fortune, and feeling himself handicapped by the antiquated methods and jealousies of his competitors, he decided to strike out for himself as an independent investigator. Some day he will tell us a few of his adventures."

Mr. Brodie had folded his arms and was looking very imposing.

"I have hunted criminals," he asserted, "in every quarter of the world. I have methods of my own. I have a genius for making use of people."

"So you see, my dear Aaron," Harvey Grimm pointed out, "at present Mr. Brodie and I are the greatest of friends. He recognises the fact that I am what is baldly spoken of as an adventurer, and that the time may come when we shall find ourselves in opposite camps, but just at present it is our privilege to be of service to Mr. Brodie."

Then a thing, ordinary enough in its way, happened in a curious manner. Mr. Brodie was a large man but he seemed suddenly to fade away. There was his empty chair and a dim vision of a retreating figure behind one of the central sideboards. Aaron Rodd seemed dimly conscious of a look of warning flashed between the two men, but nothing equal to the swift secrecy of Mr. Brodie's movements had ever confused his senses. Harvey Grimm leaned across the table, holding his liqueur glass in his hand.

"Slick fellow, Brodie," he murmured. "No good his being seen talking to us when the quarry's about, eh? Nice brandy, this. On the dry side, perhaps, but with a flavour to it."

Aaron Rodd understood that he was to ask no questions and he discussed the subject of brandy in a sufficiently ignorant manner. He, too, however, within the course of the next few seconds, found need for the exercise of all his powers of self-control. Only a few yards away from him was a young man in some foreign uniform, with his arm in a

sling, discussing with a *maître d'hôtel* as to the locality of his table. By his side was the girl with whom he had talked that morning in the Embankment Gardens, and behind the two, a somewhat pathetic picture, was the old man, his face as withered as parchment, his narrow white beard carefully trimmed, leaning heavily upon a stick. Almost as he realised their presence they moved on, escorted by the *maître d'hôtel* to a table in a distant corner. Aaron Rodd drew a long breath as they disappeared. His companion looked at him curiously.

"Are those the people," the lawyer asked eagerly, "on whose account Brodie moved away?"

Harvey Grimm watched them settle in their places.

"They are," he admitted. "A pathetic-looking trio! ... And, now, my dear Aaron," he went on, "we will discuss your little adventure in the Embankment Gardens this morning. You perceive that the moment is appropriate."

"My little adventure?" Aaron Rodd repeated blankly. "Why—you mean to say you were there, then? You saw her speak to me?"

"Certainly! I was seated a little further down, talking with my friend Mr. Brodie. We had our eyes upon the young lady."

Aaron Rodd felt a sudden disinclination to speak of that little gleam of sunshine.

"She spoke to me quite casually," he declared. "Afterwards she asked me my profession. I told her that I was a lawyer. Perhaps she had already guessed it. I suppose I do rather look the part."

"You do indeed, my friend! And then?"

The younger man hesitated. His partner's benevolent face suddenly assumed a sterner aspect.

"Aaron," he reminded him, "we are on business. The truth, please—no reservations."

"She asked me," the other went on, "whether the confidence of a client is always respected by one in my profession."

"And your reply?"

"I assured her, of course, that under any circumstances it was."

Harvey Grimm leaned back in his chair. He rolled the remaining drop of brandy around in his glass, his expression was beatific.

"My dear Aaron," he said, "fate smiles upon our new partnership. The young lady is going to pay you a visit?"

"At three o'clock this afternoon, if she keeps her word."

"Finish your brandy and come with me to my apartment," Harvey Grimm directed. "We have matters to discuss and arrange before you receive that visit."

An hour or so later, Aaron Rodd was seated once more before his dilapidated, ink-stained desk. The gloom of the winter afternoon was only partly dissipated by the single gas-jet burning above his head. The same old lease was spread out underneath his hands. In his face, however, there was a distinct change. The listlessness had gone. He had the air of one awaiting events. So he had sat for the last half-hour, with his eyes fixed alternately upon the outside door, purposely left ajar, and the inner one which led to his humble bed-sitting-room.

There came at last the sound for which he had been waiting. Up that last flight of stone stairs he could hear distinctly the slow movement of weary footsteps, the continual tapping of a stick, the occasional cough and querulous complaint of a tired old man, and by the side of those shuffling footsteps, others, marvellously light, the swish of a silken skirt, the music of a clear, very sweet young voice.

"You see, we are arrived," she was saying. "There is the name upon the door. You will be able to sit down directly. Courage, dear grandfather. Remember it is for Leopold's sake."

Then there followed a gentle knock, the somewhat hesitating entrance of the two, the half-doubtful look of the girl towards the tall, gaunt young man whose face seemed almost saturnine underneath that unshaded light. As he moved forward, however, she recognised him, and a smile of relief parted her lips.

"Ah! it is Mr. Rodd, is it not—the gentleman with whom I spoke in the Gardens this morning—the lawyer?"

He bowed. Anxiety made his voice sound even harsher. Many things had happened since the morning.

"You have kept your promise, then," he remarked. "You have come to consult me. I am at your service. One moment."

He brought two of the chairs which stood stiffly against the wall, and placed them by the side of his desk. The old man sat down with an air of relief. The passage up the stairs had apparently exhausted him.

"We are very haphazard clients, I fear, Mr. Rodd," he said wearily. "This is unfortunately one of my bad days. I must leave my granddaughter to explain the reason of our visit, and in what manner we hope to be able to make use of your services."

"If I do so, grandfather," she said, turning a little towards him, "I am going to tell the whole truth."

"If it must be," he murmured uneasily.

The girl took up at once the burden of explanation.

"My grandfather, my brother and myself," she began, "are staying at the Milan Hotel. We make use of a name, the name of Brinnen, to which we have some right, even though it may be a shadowy one. We happen to be Belgians by birth, a fact which at the present moment makes our position easier. To be honest with you, however, my brother has just returned from America. He has been engaged for some time in more hazardous enterprises, even, than defending his country against the Germans."

The old man interrupted her impatiently.

"These explanations are waste of time," he insisted. "Tell this gentleman quickly what we desire of him."

She patted his hand and glanced half apologetically across at Aaron Rodd. He had resumed his seat before his desk, his face half hidden by his hand. Listening to the girl's voice, he had become conscious of a long-forgotten sentiment. Encumbered though she was with a difficult mission, there was a certain fineness of speech and manner, an appeal for sympathy in even this last gesture, which he found strangely disturbing.

"You need explain to me no more than you wish," he told her, a little stiffly. "I shall be glad to be of any service to you. There is no need for you to enter into any painful details."

She shrugged her shoulders protestingly.

"You and my grandfather are of one mind," she remarked. "Then I will make a confession which may sound abrupt but which is nevertheless true. We three—my brother, my grandfather and myself—are not entitled to the sympathy we receive. We are, to a certain extent, impostors. Is your standard of morals a very high one, Mr. Rodd?"

"I—I scarcely really know," he stammered. "As a lawyer I am brought into contact with all conditions of people. I have before now done my best for the criminal as I have for the honest man."

"It is reassuring," she admitted. "Behold, then, my full confession. You have to do now with criminals—or may I say adventurers? We have, we three, to dispose of secretly a very large amount of precious stones. I have come to you for advice. The ordinary avenues of sale are closed to us. How can we get into touch with some one who will buy them and ask no questions?"

Aaron Rodd was conscious of a little shock. Up to this last moment he had been doubtful. Notwithstanding the story which had been unfolded to him by Harvey Grimm, he had clung to his first impressions, impressions from which he was parting now with dire reluctance.

"It is not an easy matter," he admitted, "but if anyone can help you, I can."

The girl nodded.