

Copyrighted Material

I

The steamer, *Sestri Levante*, stood high above the dockside, and the watery sleet, carried on the wind blustering down from the Black Sea, had drenched even the small shelter deck. In the after well the Turkish stevedores, with sacking tied round their shoulders, were still loading cargo.

Graham saw the steward carry his suitcase through a door marked PASSEGGIERI, and turned aside to see if the two men who had shaken hands with him at the foot of the gangway were still there. They had not come aboard lest the uniform of one of them should draw attention to him. Now they were walking away across the crane lines towards the warehouses and the dock gates beyond. As they reached the shelter of the first shed they looked back. He raised his left arm and saw an answering wave. They walked on out of sight.

For a moment he stood there shivering and staring out of the mist that shrouded the domes and spires of Istanbul. Behind the rumble and clatter of the winches, the Turkish foreman was shouting plaintively in bad Italian to one of the ship's officers. Graham remembered that he had been told to go to his cabin and stay there until the ship sailed. He followed the steward through the door.

The man was waiting for him at the head of a short flight of stairs. There was no sign of any of the nine other passengers.

'Cinque, signore?'

Copyrighted Material

'Yes.'

'Da queste parte.'

Graham followed him below.

Number five was a small cabin with a single bunk, a combined wardrobe and washing cabinet, and only just enough floor space left over to take him and his suitcase. The porthole fittings were caked with verdigris, and there was a strong smell of paint. The steward manhandled the suitcase under the bunk, and squeezed out into the alleyway.

'Favorisca di darmi il suo biglietto ed il suo passaporto, signore. Li porterò al Commissario.'

Graham gave him the ticket and passport, and, pointing to the porthole, made the motions of unscrewing and opening it.

The steward said, *'Subito, signore,'* and went away.

Graham sat down wearily on the bunk. It was the first time for nearly twenty-four hours that he had been left alone to think. He took his right hand carefully out of his overcoat pocket, and looked at the bandages swathed round it. It throbbed and ached abominably. If that was what a bullet graze felt like, he thanked his stars that the bullet had not really hit him.

He looked round the cabin, accepting his presence in it as he had accepted so many other absurdities since he had returned to his hotel in Pera the night before. The acceptance was unquestioning. He felt only as if he had lost something valuable. In fact, he had lost nothing of any value but a sliver of skin and cartilage from the back of his right hand. All that had happened to him was that he had discovered the fear of death.

By the husbands of his wife's friends, Graham was considered lucky. He had a highly paid job with a big armaments manufacturing concern, a pleasant house in the country an hour's drive from his office, and a wife whom everyone liked. Not that he didn't deserve it all. He was, though you would never think it to look at him, a brilliant engineer; quite an

important one if some of the things you heard were true, something to do with guns. He went abroad a good deal on business. He was a quiet, likeable sort of chap, and generous with his whisky. You couldn't, of course, imagine yourself getting to know him very well (it was hard to say which was worse – his golf or his bridge), but he was always friendly. Nothing effusive, just friendly, a bit like an expensive dentist trying to take your mind off things. He looked rather like an expensive dentist, too, when you came to think of it: thin and slightly stooping, with well-cut clothes, a good smile, and hair going a bit grey. But if it was difficult to imagine a woman like Stephanie marrying him for anything except his salary, you had to admit that they got on extraordinarily well together. It only went to show . . .

Graham himself also thought that he was lucky. From his father, a diabetic schoolmaster, he had inherited, at the age of seventeen, an easy-going disposition, five hundred pounds in cash from a life insurance policy, and a good mathematical brain. The first legacy had enabled him to endure without resentment the ministrations of a reluctant and cantankerous guardian; the second had made it possible for him to use the scholarship he had won to a university; the third resulted in his securing in his middle twenties a science doctorate. The subject of his thesis had been a problem in ballistics, and an abridged version of it had appeared in a technical journal. By the time he was thirty he was in charge of one of his employers' experimental departments, and a little surprised that he should be paid so much money for doing something that he liked doing. That same year he had married Stephanie.

It never occurred to him to doubt that his attitude towards his wife was that of any other man towards a wife to whom he has been married for ten years. He had married her because he had been tired of living in furnished rooms, and had assumed (correctly) that she had married him to get away from her

father – a disagreeable and impecunious doctor. He was pleased by her good looks, her good humour, and her capacity for keeping servants and making friends, and if he sometimes found the friends tiresome, was inclined to blame himself rather than them. She, on her part, accepted the fact that he was more interested in his work than in anyone or anything else as a matter of course and without resentment. She liked her life exactly as it was. They lived in an atmosphere of good-natured affection and mutual tolerance, and thought their marriage as successful as one could reasonably expect a marriage to be.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 had little effect on the Graham household. Having spent the previous two years with the certain knowledge that such an outbreak was as inevitable as the going down of the sun, Graham was neither astonished nor dismayed when it occurred. He had calculated to a nicety its probable effects on his private life, and by October he was able to conclude that his calculations had been correct. For him, the war meant more work, but that was all. It touched neither his economic nor his personal security. He could not, under any circumstances, become liable for combatant military service. The chances of a German bomber unloading its cargo anywhere near either his house or his office were remote enough to be disregarded. When he learned, just three weeks after the signing of the Anglo–Turkish treaty of alliance, that he was to go to Turkey on company business, he was troubled only by the dismal prospect of spending Christmas away from home.

He had been thirty-two when he had made his first business trip abroad. It had been a success. His employers had discovered that, in addition to his technical ability, he had the faculty, unusual in a man with his particular qualifications, of making himself amiable to – and liked by – foreign government officials. In the years that followed, occasional trips abroad had become part of his working life. He enjoyed them. He liked the

actual business of getting to a strange city almost as much as he liked discovering its strangeness. He liked meeting men of other nationalities, learning smatterings of their languages, and being appalled at his lack of understanding of both. He had acquired a wholesome dislike of the word 'typical'.

Towards the middle of November he reached Istanbul, by train from Paris, and left it almost immediately for Izmir and, later, Gallipoli. By the end of December he had finished his work in those two places, and on the first of January took a train back to Istanbul, the starting point of his journey home.

He had had a trying six weeks. His job had been a difficult one made more difficult by his having to discuss highly technical subjects through interpreters. The horror of the Anatolian earthquake disaster had upset him nearly as much as it had upset his hosts. Finally, the train service from Gallipoli to Istanbul had been disorganized by floods. By the time he arrived back in Istanbul he was feeling tired and depressed.

He was met at the station by Kopeikin, the company's representative in Turkey.

Kopeikin had arrived in Istanbul with sixty-five thousand other Russian refugees in 1924, and had been, by turns, card-sharper, part owner of a brothel, and army clothing contractor before he had secured – the managing director alone knew how – the lucrative agency he now held. Graham liked him. He was a plump, exuberant man with large projecting ears, irrepressible high spirits, and a vast fund of low cunning.

He wrung Graham's hand enthusiastically. 'Have you had a bad trip? I am so sorry. It is good to see you back again. How did you get on with Fethi?'

'Very well, I think. I imagined something much worse from your description of him.'

'My dear fellow, you underrate your charm of manner. He is known to be difficult. But he is important. Now everything will

go smoothly. But we will talk business over a drink. I have engaged a room for you – a room with a bath, at the Adler-Palace, as before. For tonight I have arranged a farewell dinner. The expense is mine.’

‘It’s very good of you.’

‘A great pleasure, my dear fellow. Afterwards we will amuse ourselves a little. There is a box that is very popular at the moment – Le Jockey Cabaret. You will like it, I think. It is very nicely arranged, and the people who go there are quite nice. No riff-raff. Is this your luggage?’

Graham’s heart sank. He had expected to have dinner with Kopeikin, but he had been promising himself that about ten o’clock he would have a hot bath and go to bed with a Tauchnitz detective story. The last thing he wanted to do was to ‘amuse’ himself at Le Jockey Cabaret, or any other night place. He said, as they followed the porter out to Kopeikin’s car, ‘I think that perhaps I ought to get to bed early tonight, Kopeikin. I’ve got four nights in a train in front of me.’

‘My dear fellow, it will do you good to be late. Besides, your train does not go until eleven tomorrow morning, and I have reserved a sleeper for you. You can sleep all the way to Paris if you feel tired.’

Over dinner at the Pera Palace Hotel, Kopeikin gave war news. For him, the Soviets were still ‘the July assassins’ of Nicholas the Second, and Graham heard much of Finnish victories and Russian defeats. The Germans had sunk more British ships and lost more submarines. The Dutch, the Danes, the Swedes and the Norwegians were looking to their defences. The world awaited a bloody spring. They went on to talk about the earthquake. It was half-past ten when Kopeikin announced that it was time for them to leave for Le Jockey Cabaret.

It was in the Beyoglu quarter, just off the Grande Rue de Pera, and in a street of buildings obviously designed by a French

architect of the middle 1920s. Kopeikin took his arm affectionately as they went in.

‘It is a very nice place, this,’ he said. ‘Serge, the proprietor, is a friend of mine, so they will not cheat us. I will introduce you to him.’

For the man he was, Graham’s knowledge of the night life of cities was surprisingly extensive. For some reason, the nature of which he could never discover, his foreign hosts always seemed to consider that the only form of entertainment acceptable to an English engineer was that to be found in the rather less reputable *Nachtlokalen*. He had been in such places in Buenos Aires and in Madrid, in Valparaiso and in Bucharest, in Rome and in Mexico, and he could not remember one that was very much different from any of the others. He could remember the business acquaintances with whom he had sat far into the early morning hours drinking outrageously expensive drinks, but the places themselves had merged in his mind’s eye into one prototypical picture of a smoke-filled basement room with a platform for the band at one end, a small space for dancing surrounded by tables, and a bar with stools, where the drinks were alleged to be cheaper, to one side.

He did not expect Le Jockey Cabaret to be any different. It was not.

The mural decorations seemed to have caught the spirit of the street outside. They consisted of a series of immense vorticisms involving skyscrapers at camera angles, coloured saxophone players, green all-seeing eyes, telephones, Easter Island masks, and ash-blond hermaphrodites with long cigarette holders. The place was crowded and very noisy. Serge was a sharp-featured Russian with bristly grey hair and the air of one whose feelings were constantly on the point of getting the better of his judgement. To Graham, looking at his eyes, it seemed unlikely that they ever did, but he greeted them graciously

enough, and showed them to a table beside the dance floor. Kopeikin ordered a bottle of brandy.

The band brought an American dance tune, which they had been playing with painful zeal, to an abrupt end and began, with more success, to play a rumba.

'It is very gay here,' said Kopeikin. 'Would you like to dance? There are plenty of girls. Say which you fancy and I will speak to Serge.'

'Oh, don't bother. I really don't think I ought to stay long.'

'You must stop thinking about your journey. Drink some more brandy and you will feel better.' He got to his feet. 'I shall dance now and find a nice girl for you.'

Graham felt guilty. He should, he knew, be displaying more enthusiasm. Kopeikin was, after all, being extraordinarily kind. It could be no pleasure to him to try to entertain a train-weary Englishman who would have preferred to be in bed. He drank some more brandy determinedly. More people were arriving. He saw Serge greet them warmly and then, when their backs were turned, issue a furtive instruction to the waiter who was to serve them; a drab little reminder that *Le Jockey Cabaret* was in business neither for his own pleasure nor for theirs. He turned his head to watch Kopeikin dancing.

The girl was thin and dark and had very big teeth. Her red satin evening dress drooped on her as if it had been made for a bigger woman. She smiled a great deal. Kopeikin held her slightly away from him and talked all the time they were dancing. To Graham, he seemed, despite the grossness of his body, to be the only man on the floor who was completely self-possessed. He was the ex-brothel-proprietor dealing with something he understood perfectly. When the music stopped he brought the girl over to their table.

'This is Maria,' he said. 'She is an Arab. You would not think it to look at her, would you?'
Copyrighted Material

‘No, you wouldn’t.’

‘She speaks a little French.’

‘*Enchanté, Mademoiselle.*’

‘*Monsieur.*’ Her voice was unexpectedly harsh, but her smile was pleasant. She was obviously good natured.

‘Poor child!’ Kopeikin’s tone was that of a governess who hoped that her charge would not disgrace her before visitors. ‘She has only just recovered from a sore throat. But she is a very nice girl and has good manners. *Assieds-toi, Maria.*’

She sat down beside Graham. ‘*Je prends du champagne,*’ she said.

‘*Oui, oui, mon enfant. Plus tard,*’ said Kopeikin vaguely. ‘She gets extra commission if we order champagne,’ he remarked to Graham, and poured out some brandy for her.

She took it without comment, raised it to her lips, and said, ‘*Skal!*’

‘She thinks you are a Swede,’ said Kopeikin.

‘Why?’

‘She likes Swedes, so I said you were a Swede.’ He chuckled. ‘You cannot say that the Turkish agent does nothing for the company.’

She had been listening to them with an uncomprehending smile. Now, the music began again and, turning to Graham, she asked him if he would like to dance.

She danced well. Well enough for him to feel that he, too, was dancing well. He felt less depressed and asked her to dance again. The second time she pressed her thin body hard against him. He saw a grubby shoulder strap begin to work its way out from under the red satin and smelt the heat of her body behind the scent she used. He found that he was getting tired of her.

She began to talk. Did he know Istanbul well? Had he been there before? Did he know Paris? And London? He was lucky. She had never been to those places. She hoped to go to them.

And to Stockholm, too. Had he many friends in Istanbul? She asked because there was a gentleman who had come in just after him and his friend who seemed to know him. This gentleman kept looking at him.

Graham had been wondering how soon he could get away. He realized suddenly that she was waiting for him to say something. His mind had caught her last remark.

‘Who keeps looking at me?’

‘We cannot see him now. The gentleman is sitting at the bar.’

‘No doubt he’s looking at you.’ There seemed nothing else to say.

But she was evidently serious. ‘It is in you that he is interested, Monsieur. It is the one with the handkerchief in his hand.’

They had reached a point on the floor from which he could see the bar. The man was sitting on a stool with a glass of vermouth in front of him.

He was a short, thin man with a stupid face, very bony with large nostrils, prominent cheekbones and full lips pressed together as if he had sore gums or were trying to keep his temper. He was intensely pale and his small, deep-set eyes and thinning, curly hair seemed in consequence darker than they were. The hair was plastered in streaks across his skull. He wore a crumpled brown suit with lumpy padded shoulders, a soft shirt with an almost invisible collar, and a new grey tie. As Graham watched him he wiped his upper lip with the handkerchief as if the heat of the place were making him sweat.

‘He doesn’t seem to be looking at me now,’ Graham said. ‘Anyway, I don’t know him, I’m afraid.’

‘I do not think so, Monsieur.’ She pressed his arm to her side with her elbow. ‘But I wished to be sure. I do not know him either, but I know the type. You are a stranger here, Monsieur, and you perhaps have money in your pocket. Istanbul is not like Stockholm. When such types look at you more than once, it is

advisable to be careful. You are strong, but a knife in the back is the same for a strong man as for a small one.'

Her solemnity was ludicrous. He laughed, but he looked again at the man by the bar. He was sipping at his vermouth; an inoffensive creature. The girl was probably trying, rather clumsily, to demonstrate that her own intentions were good.

He said, 'I don't think that I need worry.'

She relaxed the pressure on his arm. 'Perhaps not, Monsieur.' She seemed suddenly to lose interest in the subject. The band stopped and they returned to the table.

'She dances very nicely, doesn't she?' said Kopeikin.

'Very.'

She smiled at them, sat down and finished her drink as if she were thirsty. Then she sat back. 'We are three,' she said and counted round with one finger to make sure they understood, 'would you like me to bring a friend of mine to have a drink with us? She is very sympathetic. She is my greatest friend.'

'Later, perhaps,' said Kopeikin. He poured her out another drink.

At that moment, the band played a resounding 'chordon' and most of the lights went out. A spotlight quivered on the floor in front of the platform.

'The *attractions*,' said Maria. 'It is very good.'

Serge stepped into the spotlight and pattered off a long announcement in Turkish which ended in a flourish of the hand towards a door beside the platform. Two dark young men in pale-blue dinner jackets promptly dashed out on to the floor and proceeded to do an energetic tap dance. They were soon breathless and their hair became dishevelled, but the applause, when they had finished, was lukewarm. Then they put on false beards and, pretending to be old men, did some tumbling. The audience was only slightly more enthusiastic. They retired, rather angrily Graham thought, dripping with perspiration. They were

followed by a handsome coloured woman with long thin legs who proved to be a contortionist. Her contortions were ingeniously obscene and evoked gusts of laughter. In response to shouts, she followed her contortions with a snake dance. This was not so successful, as the snake, produced from a gilt wicker crate as cautiously as if it had been a fully grown anaconda, proved to be a small and rather senile python with a tendency to fall asleep in its mistress's hands. It was finally bundled back into its crate while she did some more contortions. When she had gone, the proprietor stepped once more into the spotlight and made an announcement that was greeted with clapping.

The girl put her lips to Graham's ear. 'It is Josette and her partner, José. They are dancers from Paris. This is their last night here. They have had a great success.'

The spotlight became pink and swept to the entrance door. There was a roll of drums. Then, as the band struck up the 'Blue Danube' waltz, the dancers glided on to the floor.

For the weary Graham, their dance was as much a part of the cellar convention as the bar and the platform for the band. It was something to justify the prices of the drinks; a demonstration of the fact that, by applying the laws of classical mechanics, one small, unhealthy looking man with a broad sash round his waist could handle an eight stone woman as if she were a child. Josette and her partner were remarkable only in that, although they carried out the standard 'speciality' routine rather less efficiently than usual, they managed to do so with considerably more effect.

She was a slim woman with beautiful arms and shoulders and a mass of gleaming fair hair. Her heavily lidded eyes, almost closed as she danced, and the rather full lips, fixed in a theatrical half-smile, contradicted in a curious way the swift neatness of her movements. Graham saw that she was not a dancer but a woman who had been trained to dance and who did so with a

sort of indolent sensuality, conscious of her young-looking body, her long legs, and the muscles below the smooth surfaces of her thighs and stomach. If her performance did not succeed as a dance, as an *attraction* at Le Jockey Cabaret it succeeded perfectly and in spite of her partner.

He was a dark, preoccupied man with tight, disagreeable lips, a smooth sallow face, and an irritating way of sticking his tongue hard in his cheek as he prepared to exert himself. He moved badly and was clumsy, his fingers shifting uncertainly as he grasped her for the lifts as if he were uncertain of the point of balance. He was constantly steadying himself.

But the audience was not looking at him, and when they had finished called loudly for an encore. It was given. The band played another 'chordon'. Mademoiselle Josette took a bow and was presented with a bouquet of flowers by Serge. She returned several times and bowed and kissed her hand.

'She is quite charming, isn't she?' Kopeikin said in English as the lights went up. 'I promised you that this place was amusing.'

'She's quite good. But it's a pity about the moth-eaten Valentino.'

'José? He does well for himself. Would you like to have her to the table for a drink?'

'Very much. But won't it be rather expensive?'

'Gracious no! She does not get commission.'

'Will she come?'

'Of course. The *patron* introduced me. I know her well. You might take to her, I think. This Arab is a little stupid. No doubt Josette is stupid, too, but she is very attractive in her way. If I had not learned too much when I was too young, I should like her myself.'

Maria stared after him as he went across the floor, and remained silent for a moment. Then she said, 'He is very good, that friend of yours.'

Graham was not quite sure whether it was a statement, a question, or a feeble attempt to make conversation. He nodded. 'Very good.'

She smiled. 'He knows the proprietor well. If you desire it, he will ask Serge to let me go when you wish instead of when the place closes.'

He smiled as regretfully as he could. 'I'm afraid, Maria, that I have to pack my luggage and catch a train in the morning.'

She smiled again. 'It does not matter. But I specially like the Swedes. May I have some more brandy, Monsieur?'

'Of course.' He refilled her glass.

She drank half of it. 'Do you like Mademoiselle Josette?'

'She dances very well.'

'She is very sympathetic. That is because she has a success. When people have a success they are sympathetic. José, nobody likes. He is a Spaniard from Morocco, and very jealous. They are all the same. I do not know how she stands him.'

'I thought you said they were Parisians.'

'They have danced in Paris. She is from Hungary. She speaks languages – German, Spanish, English – but not Swedish, I think. She has had many rich lovers.' She paused. 'Are you a business man, Monsieur?'

'No, an engineer.' He realized, with some amusement, that Maria was less stupid than she seemed, and that she knew exactly why Kopeikin had left them. He was being warned, indirectly but unmistakably, that Mademoiselle Josette was very expensive, that communication with her would be difficult, and that he would have a jealous Spaniard to deal with.

She drained her glass again, and stared vaguely in the direction of the bar. 'My friend is looking very lonely,' she said. She turned her head and looked directly at him. 'Will you give me a hundred piastres, Monsieur?'

'What for?' **Copyrighted Material**

'A tip, Monsieur.' She smiled, but in not quite so friendly a fashion as before.

He gave her a hundred piastre note. She folded it up, put it in her bag, and stood up. 'Will you excuse me, please. I wish to speak to my friend. I will come back if you wish.' She smiled.

He saw her red satin dress disappear in the crowd gathered round the bar. Kopeikin returned almost immediately.

'Where is the Arab?'

'She's gone to speak to her best friend. I gave her a hundred piastres.'

'A hundred! Fifty would have been plenty. But perhaps it is as well. Josette asks us to have a drink with her in her dressing room. She is leaving Istanbul tomorrow, and does not wish to come out here. She will have to speak to so many people, and she has packing to do.'

'Shan't we be rather a nuisance?'

'My dear fellow, she is anxious to meet you. She saw you while she was dancing. When I told her that you were an Englishman, she was delighted. We can leave these drinks here.'

Mademoiselle Josette's dressing room was a space about eight feet square, partitioned off from the other half of what appeared to be the proprietor's office by a brown curtain. The three solid walls were covered with faded pink wallpaper with stripes of blue; there were greasy patches here and there where people had leaned against them. The room contained two bentwood chairs and two rickety dressing tables littered with cream jars and dirty make-up towels. There was a mixed smell of stale cigarette smoke, face powder and damp upholstery.

As they went in in response to a grunt of 'Entrez' from the partner, José, he got up from his dressing table. Still wiping the grease paint from his face, he walked out without a glance at them. For some reason, Kopeikin winked at Graham. Josette was leaning forward in her chair dabbing intently at one of her

eyebrows with a swab of damp cotton wool. She had discarded her costume, and put on a rose velvet housecoat. Her hair hung down loosely about her head as if she had shaken it out and brushed it. It was really, Graham thought, very beautiful hair. She began to speak in slow, careful English, punctuating the words with dabs.

‘Please excuse me. It is this filthy paint. It . . . *Merde!*’

She threw the swab down impatiently, stood up suddenly and turned her face to them.

In the hard light of the unshaded bulb above her head she looked smaller than she had looked on the dance floor, and a trifle haggard. Graham, thinking of his Stephanie’s rather buxom good looks, reflected that the woman before him would probably be quite plain in ten years’ time. He was in the habit of comparing other women with his wife. As a method of disguising from himself the fact that other women still interested him, it was usually effective. But Josette was unusual. What she might look like in ten years’ time was altogether beside the point. At that moment she was a very attractive, self-possessed woman with a soft, smiling mouth, slightly protuberant blue eyes, and a sleepy vitality that seemed to fill the room.

‘This, my dear Josette,’ said Kopeikin, ‘is Mr Graham.’

‘I enjoyed your dancing very much, Mademoiselle,’ he said.

‘So Kopeikin told me.’ She shrugged. ‘It could be better, I think, but it is very good of you to say that you like it. It is nonsense to say that Englishmen are not polite.’ She flourished her hand round the room. ‘I do not like to ask you to sit down in this filth, but please try to make yourself comfortable. There is José’s chair for Kopeikin, and if you could push José’s things away, the corner of his table will be for you. It is too bad that we cannot sit together in comfort outside, but there are so many of these men who make some *chi-chi* if one does not stop and drink some of their champagne. The champagne here is filthy. I

do not wish to leave Istanbul with a headache. How long do you stay here, Mr Graham?’

‘I, too, leave tomorrow.’ She amused him. Her posturing was absurd. Within the space of a minute she had been a great actress receiving wealthy visitors, a friendly woman of the world, and a disillusioned genius of the dance. Every movement, every piece of affectation was calculated. It was as if she were still dancing.

Now she became a serious student of affairs. ‘It is terrible, this travelling. And you go back to your war. I am sorry. These filthy Nazis. It is such a pity that there must be wars. And if it is not wars, it is earthquakes. Always death. It is so bad for business. I am not interested in death. Kopeikin is, I think. Perhaps it is because he is a Russian.’

‘I think nothing of death,’ said Kopeikin. ‘I am concerned only that the waiter shall bring the drinks I ordered. Will you have a cigarette?’

‘Please, yes. The waiters here are filthy. There must be much better places than this in London, Mr Graham.’

‘The waiters there are very bad, too. Waiters are, I think, mostly very bad. But I should have thought you had been to London. Your English . . .’

Her smile tolerated his indiscretion, the depths of which he could not know. As well to have asked the Pompadour who had paid her bills. ‘I learned it from an American and in Italy. I have a great sympathy for Americans. They are so clever in business, and yet so generous and sincere. I think it is most important to be sincere. Was it amusing dancing with that little Maria, Mr Graham?’

‘She dances very well. She seems to admire you very much. She says that you have a great success. You do, of course.’

‘A great success! Here?’ The disillusioned genius raised her eyebrows. ‘I hope you gave her a good tip, Mr Graham.’