

"I think they are at the corner of the square, to the left," she whispered. "Do not look in that direction, but come straight into the cab. We go to the Cafe Royal."

The door turned softly behind them, and Reginald, his eyes fixed rigidly on the cab, valiantly resisting a desperate impulse to plunge into it headlong, descended the steps with nervous deliberation. Truly this was an adventure at last.

He experienced a feeling of much relief when they were safely seated in the cab and bowling along the streets toward Bloomsbury; but he got little conversation from his companion, who seemed nervous and thoughtful. He ventured a doubt as to their being followed, but she assured him that her brother had been followed on such an occasion the previous evening, a little later, and surmised that the enemy must keep a cab within call. And to the suggestion that an arrival at the Cafe Royal at 6 o'clock would be a little awkward, she replied that there was a very particular reason for it, which her brother would explain in detail when he had the happiness of personally meeting Mr Drinkwater, to whom he would be eternally grateful.

Through Hart-street they turned into New Oxford-street, and so down Shaftesbury-avenue. As they neared Piccadilly Circus, she spoke again. "If you will pay the man through the roof-door," she said, "we will not have to stand long at the door."

Reginald admired the mental alertness that could suggest this expedient to a foreigner in London, and complied with the suggestion; so that when the cab pulled up before the Cafe Royal they lost no time in reaching the swing doors. Reginald saw with some apprehension that another cab stopped a little way behind them; though, after all, with so many other cabs about it might not be worth considering.

The doors swung behind them, and Reginald felt a further accession of confidence. What an adventure!

But here he encountered surprise and disappointment. For Lucia turned to him and said hurriedly: "Oh, Mr Drinkwater, I can never repay you! How brave you are! I have been in terrible fear for you all the way. Perhaps I ought not to have brought you, but there was no other friend for my dear brother—the brother I love so well! Will you promise to stay here, and not show yourself till after dinner? Till 9 o'clock?"

"Certainly—we must wait before dinner—we—we—"

"Thank you, oh, thank you!" she interrupted, seizing his hand. "I must leave you now—I must go at once to my brother. There is a side-door here, I know, into a little dark street; I shall not be seen. I will see you, or write to you very soon. Good-bye, my noble friend."

And with that she was gone, leaving Reginald dumb and blinking. So he stood till it occurred that he was attracting attention, which indeed he was. Whereupon he stalked gloomily across the room and flung himself into a seat; and being impelled to do something desperate, he ordered absinthe, which he did not like, but which was the most desperate form of refreshment he could think of.

He sat alone and glowered and smoked cigarettes for an hour and a-half: a period of time which sufficed to relieve his disappointment and arouse his interest in the very excellent dinner, which was to follow. And the excellent dinner reconciled him to his circumstances so far that he began to congratulate himself on having very cleverly foiled a very desperate gang of conspirators. He fell to wondering when and how he should next hear of Lucia da Silva; and so, at a little past 9 o'clock he made his way home on foot, rather better satisfied with himself, on the whole, than he had felt after any other dinner he could remember. For he had an idea that he had snatched himself very well; and indeed it was a jewel of an adventure!

Three more next morning he endured the society of Mrs Churcher after breakfast—the fog was even heavier to-day—but there was no call. None, indeed, till the afternoon, and then it was a messenger boy, with a letter—a letter written on scented paper in violet ink, but scribbled so hurriedly that it was often difficult to separate words and sentences. This done, it read thus:—

MY DEAR FRIEND.—  
My brother and I cannot thank you enough for your generous kindness last night, which, alas! did not avail so effectually as we had hoped. The watching enemy were, as you know, two; and

it would seem that only one followed us, leaving the other, the small short man, to watch and confront my brother. This led to something which has altered our plans, and makes us ask you for one favour more. Will you do it? Do not refuse after such kindness as you have shown. Will you go with a cab this evening at about 6 to the house we have left and bring away a large box? Enclosed is a note for the landlady, who will give you the box and will hand you a hasty note of instructions I have left. Do not read that note until you are in the cab and safely away with the box, and do not let the cab stand at the house longer than you can help. Also do not mention our real name to the landlady—you will understand that we have been obliged to conceal it. This time you will go to the front door, of course. Send me a note by this messenger saying that you will do this without fail.

Ever yours gratefully and hopefully,  
LUCIA.

Here was more food for Reginald's romantic appetite, which was by no means sated yet, but rather sharpened by experience. He longed to learn what had happened as the result of the encounter of Luiz and his enemy, and how the plot stood now. So he sent by the messenger a hurried note that he would certainly and gladly do all that was asked of him, and addressed himself to preparations. Such an adventure!

It was within a very few minutes of 6 that Reginald's cab—this time a four-wheeler, because the box might be large—brought him once more to the house in Pentonville. There was some little difficulty in finding it for the fog had been thickening all day. This he judged an advantage as regarded the removal of the box—a thing, no doubt, that would be better done unobserved.

His knock brought to the door a very commonplace servant, who took the note and presently returned with another, addressed in Lucia's handwriting to himself. Then she led him into a side room and shortly indicated the box by a jerk of the hand and a suggestion that he would find it "pretty heavy."

It was a larger box than he had expected, long and unwieldy, and more than he could carry by himself. So he called the cabman, and they found it no very easy

carrying together—the cabman, indeed, growling furiously.

The box safely mounted on the roof, Reginald lost no time in entering the cab, giving the cabman the first direction for Farringdon-road, that being the nearest main road he could think of at the moment. After an execratable delay—the cabman was exasperatingly deliberate with his rug—they moved off, and Reginald pulled out his note of instructions. It was even more hurriedly scribbled, he noticed, than the letter he had received by the messenger-boy a few hours before, the words running on with scarcely a lift of the pen, and no punctuation at all. The streets were dark as well as foggy, and he could only catch a glimpse on the paper now and again as they passed a shop or an uncommonly bright street lamp, and one or two of the more legible words started out and vanished again. "Waterloo station" was clear, near the bottom and higher up "trouble," "difficulty," and "remains." At this last word Reginald sat up with an awful shuck. Remains! What was in that heavy box on the roof?

At this moment the cab emerged into a street so full of lighted shops that the whole note became plain; separating words and sentences with some difficulty, this is what he read:—

"Sorry to trouble, but difficulty with small man caused. Troublesome thing. We must remove remains in box. Trust you implicitly. Bring to York Gate of Waterloo station 6.30."

What words can paint the consternation of Reginald Drinkwater as he read this note? "We must remove remains in box!" This, then, was the event that had altered their plans and caused them "to ask one favour more."

The encounter in the fog between Luiz da Silva and his enemy had ended in the death of the small man, and here was he, Reginald Drinkwater, carrying the corpse across London in a cab!

The callousness of the note, too! The "difficulty" with the small man had caused the trouble, and it—or he—was merely a "troublesome thing!" A truly southern contempt of human life!

As he sat, amazed and confounded, the cab pulled up in Farringdon-road, and the driver, with growls from the box, invited further instructions.

The interruption recalled Reginald to

action. "The York Gate of Waterloo station," he said, "as quick as you can get there!"

For indeed this was all he could do. They trusted him, he had accepted the trust and had given his word, though he had never guessed what it involved. And, after all, he reflected, this was a different thing, far from murder; nothing but simple self-defence. Though that consideration, somehow, made very little difference to the horror of the long box on the roof and what it held.

The cab crawled and thumped and clattered through the fog, and Reginald prayed for the fog to thicken and so hide the ghastly box from human sight. And thicken it did, so that after a martyrdom of stopping and starting and crawling through Farringdon-road, the vehicle emerged from Ludgate Circus to encounter an increasing blackness in New Bridge-street. On it crept close by the curb, and presently was lost in an immensity of mist, wherein nothing could be seen but nebulous lights in distant random spots. They were making across the end of Queen Victoria-street for Blackfriars Bridge.

The voyage across this smoky ocean seemed to be the longest stretch of the interminable journey. Once or twice the lights of some other vehicle neared and faded again, and shouts came from invisible depths; but the traffic hereabout was sparse just now. Reginald had begun to consider the possibility that the cab was making circles among the multitudinous crossings of these regions, when suddenly the horse stumbled and fell in a heap.

The cabman made one roll of it out of his rug and off the box, and was dimly visible hauling at his horse's head and clearly audible cursing its entire body. The horse, for its own part, seemed disposed to approve of the situation, and willing to accept the opportunity for a prolonged rest. Blows and shouts, it would seem to reflect, were much the same, lying or standing, and lying was the easier position. Reginald's terrors increased tenfold; there would be a crowd and a policeman, and the long box would be hauled down under general observation; and in his disordered memory the thing seemed now to have looked so like a stumpy coffin that he wondered he had not suspected it at



His arm was seized above the elbow and Lucia stood before him.