



In the Strongroom

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Peter Hames encounters a formidable adversary and inspects the most elaborate mantrap in the world

MONTÉ CARLO was in the hands of the tourists, or rather the glorified ocean-cruising tripper. The huge liner lay just outside the port, a hideously incongruous object, making the Casino, the Café de Paris and the hotel look more than ever like pasteboard toys from a child's play box when up against the material realities of life. On the crowded quay men and women were struggling into numbered automobiles or embarking upon adventures of their own in small *voitures*. Up the steep steps, a short cut into the center of the place, climbed Mr. William P. Cogan, Mr. Ernest Inman and Mr. Paul H. Doggit.

"Say, boys, ain't this great?" Mr. Inman exclaimed, taking off his strangely shaped gray felt hat and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "We're here right ahead of the others. Some spot, eh?"

"Fine!" Mr. Doggit agreed, as soon as he could get his breath.

"It's the goods!" Mr. Cogan echoed enthusiastically. "What about a quick one?"

They crossed the road towards the Hotel de Paris bar. Peter Hames, who had just issued from the hotel, came face to face with them. He recognized Mr. Ernest Inman with a little exclamation of surprise, and Mr. Inman recognized him with an exclamation in which many sentiments were mingled.

"Why, In—"

Mr. Inman let himself go.

"If it isn't Peter Hames!" he cried. "God bless my soul! They told us over in New York that you were living in these parts, but to tumble on you like this! Why, we haven't landed here two minutes. I call this fine."

Mr. Doggit and his companion, confidently awaiting an introduction, loitered expectantly in the background. Mr. Inman continued his ecstasies in a slightly lowered tone.

"Inman, the name—insurance broker, Garden Street, New York."

"I SEE," Peter Hames murmured. "Incognito, eh?"

"You must meet my friends," Mr. Inman insisted, with renewed heartiness of tone.

Introductions were effected. Peter Hames good-humoredly followed the three to the bar.

"How's the insurance business?" he asked.

"Going fine," Mr. Inman declared. "To tell you the truth, I'm over on this side to try and land something big."

"Why, I thought you'd come on this excursion steamer," Peter Hames remarked.

"So I did—quickest way of getting here. She don't waste much time until after she leaves here. Say, Hames, you might be just the man I'm looking for, to give me a few pointers."

"Glad to be of any service to you," was the cordial assurance. "What is it you want to know?"

Mr. Inman picked up his tumbler. "Will you boys excuse me for five minutes?" he begged. "Chalk another round up to me. Mr. Hames was in the same line of business as me in New York, and maybe he can tell me something I'm wanting pretty badly to know."

They waved him away with words of hearty acquiescence. Inman proceeded to a small table and seated himself opposite his old friend. He was a man somewhat inclined towards corpulence, but well set up. His cheeks were sunburnt with the voyage, and his eyes a peculiar shade of steely blue. At a first glance he was very much like Mr. Doggit. Mr. Cogan, and a few hundred other inhabitants of New York and the district, who had landed from the steamer. At close quarters, however, he had a mouth which told its own story.

"Mr. Hames," he began, "I was sorry to have to bluff a bit. You'll forgive me, I know. I came over on that boat because I thought I'd find one man I'm looking for on it. I believe he is there all right, but I haven't tumbled to it yet. I was terribly afraid you were going to get the 'Inspector' out. Nobody's wise to my walk in life, and I don't want them to be."

"You chose a pretty good alias," Peter Hames observed, smiling. "I got as far as the *In*."

"My name's Inberton still in New York, but Inman on this cruise," the latter went on. "I'm still at police

They went up the avenue at a fast double, running on a strip of green grass in order to approach as silently as possible

headquarters, but I've been promoted since you left. There's one question I should like to ask you: Do you know an elderly gentleman resident in these parts by the name of Sir Stephen Driscoll?"

"I know whom you mean," Peter Hames admitted. "Very few people know him personally."

"DO YOU happen to know if he's here now?"

"I saw him yesterday, driving out of his villa."

There was a flash of satisfaction in the Inspector's eyes.

"Far from here?"

"A couple of miles. Unless you have very influential introductions, though, I warn you that he's almost impossible to see. He is, or pretends to be, in a very delicate state of health, has a doctor practically living in the house, and menservants who lose their jobs on the spot if they admit anything in the shape of visitors."

The Inspector seemed unperturbed. "I guess I'll find my way in," he remarked. "Now I must be getting back to those boys. They want me to finish the tour with them, but this is as far as I'm going. I've had my baggage shifted off quietly."

Peter Hames made his adieu to the other two men and went on his way. The Inspector, who had walked with him to the door, watched him thoughtfully until he had disappeared. This meeting with his old acquaintance in Monte Carlo presented something of a problem to him.

SIR STEPHEN DRISCOFF, ex-diplomat, multimillionaire and man of mystery, was taking his usual morning promenade in the orangery attached to his magnificent villa on the slopes of Roquebrune. The windows were flung wide open to the soft Mediterranean breeze, and the air of the place was heavy with exotic perfume. Great palms reached to the summit of the domed roof. There were ferns of rare varieties banked up against the wall, and floating lilies, with their curious aroma, in the pool into which the waters of a fountain fell with soft, rhythmical cadence.

Sir Stephen had been a large man and even now, though gaunt and wan, he was a commanding figure, leaning upon his ebony stick as he passed backwards and forwards. His gray but still heavy eyebrows met in a frown as he recognized the approaching figure. He was a man of routine, and the time had not yet come for him to receive his secretary. A rather stout little dark man, however, came hurrying up to him.

"Sir Stephen," he began. "You cannot have finished the letters yet," his master interrupted him.

"I have not, Sir Stephen," the man admitted. "I was

disturbed by callers. As you know, Sir Stephen, it is very seldom I suggest such a thing, but I think that you should receive them for five minutes."

"Nonsense!" his employer exclaimed. "What are you talking about, Martin?"

"ONE of the two is Mr. Peter Hames," the secretary proceeded. "He is quite well known here—an American—wealthy—who paints a little for a pastime. The other is a detective from police headquarters in New York."

"What the devil does an American detective from New York, or Mr. Peter Hames for that matter, want with me?" Sir Stephen demanded.

"That is what I think you had better give them the opportunity of explaining."

Sir Stephen struck the tessellated pavement with the end of his stick.

"What the devil," he complained, "is the use of my keeping you and a dozen menservants in the house purposely to protect me from visitors, when you come and suggest that I should receive a young man whom I scarcely know from Adam, and a New York detective?"

"Today is Thursday," the secretary observed calmly. "There have been between ninety and a hundred callers already this week, not one of whom has done more than sign his name in the book. I have not suggested that you should see one of them."

"Bring them here," Sir Stephen enjoined curtly.

The secretary disappeared and returned a few minutes later, ushering in Peter Hames and his American acquaintance from the boat. The Inspector, away from his associates, had a very

professional appearance. Even the swing of his broad shoulders suggested officialdom. Sir Stephen, seated in his chair, watched their approach with a frown.

"These are the two gentlemen of whom I was speaking, Sir Stephen," Martin announced. "Mr. Hames you have met several times. As you go out so seldom, you have probably forgotten him. The gentleman whom he has brought with him is Inspector Inberton of New York, who wishes to see you upon business."

Sir Stephen nodded not unpleasantly to Peter Hames and looked keenly from under his bushy eyebrows at his companion. At a gesture from him, Martin brought chairs.

"Living in the neighborhood as he does," Sir Stephen said, "Mr. Peter Hames probably knows enough of my habits to be aware that I do not receive visitors. Perhaps you will let me know the nature of your business, Inspector, as briefly as possible."

"You can have it in a very few words, Sir Stephen," was the almost brusque reply. "This is no visit of courtesy, I can assure you. I come in pursuit of my duty. A fortnight ago a man left New York for Monaco with the sole purpose of robbing you."

"And how the devil do you know that?" Sir Stephen demanded.

"Isn't that rather a foolish question, when you consider my profession, and my position, for which Mr. Hames can vouch, in the New York police force?" the Inspector rejoined gruffly. "It is our business to keep tabs on our criminals, and to know what they're up to. As a rule, we're not particularly concerned with their

activities in foreign countries, but you were once well known in New York, and the Chief

thought that you should be protected." "Who is this fellow then, and what does he want to rob me of?" Sir Stephen asked, with grudging interest.

The Inspector's manner showed signs of irritation. Sir Stephen was evidently a new type to him.

"He isn't expecting to pull a million francs out of your safe, or anything of that sort," he replied sarcastically. "You have a document which he is after—a document which, we understand at headquarters, a firm in the city has made several attempts to obtain from you in the ordinary course of business."

"What is this man talking about, Martin?" Sir Stephen inquired testily.

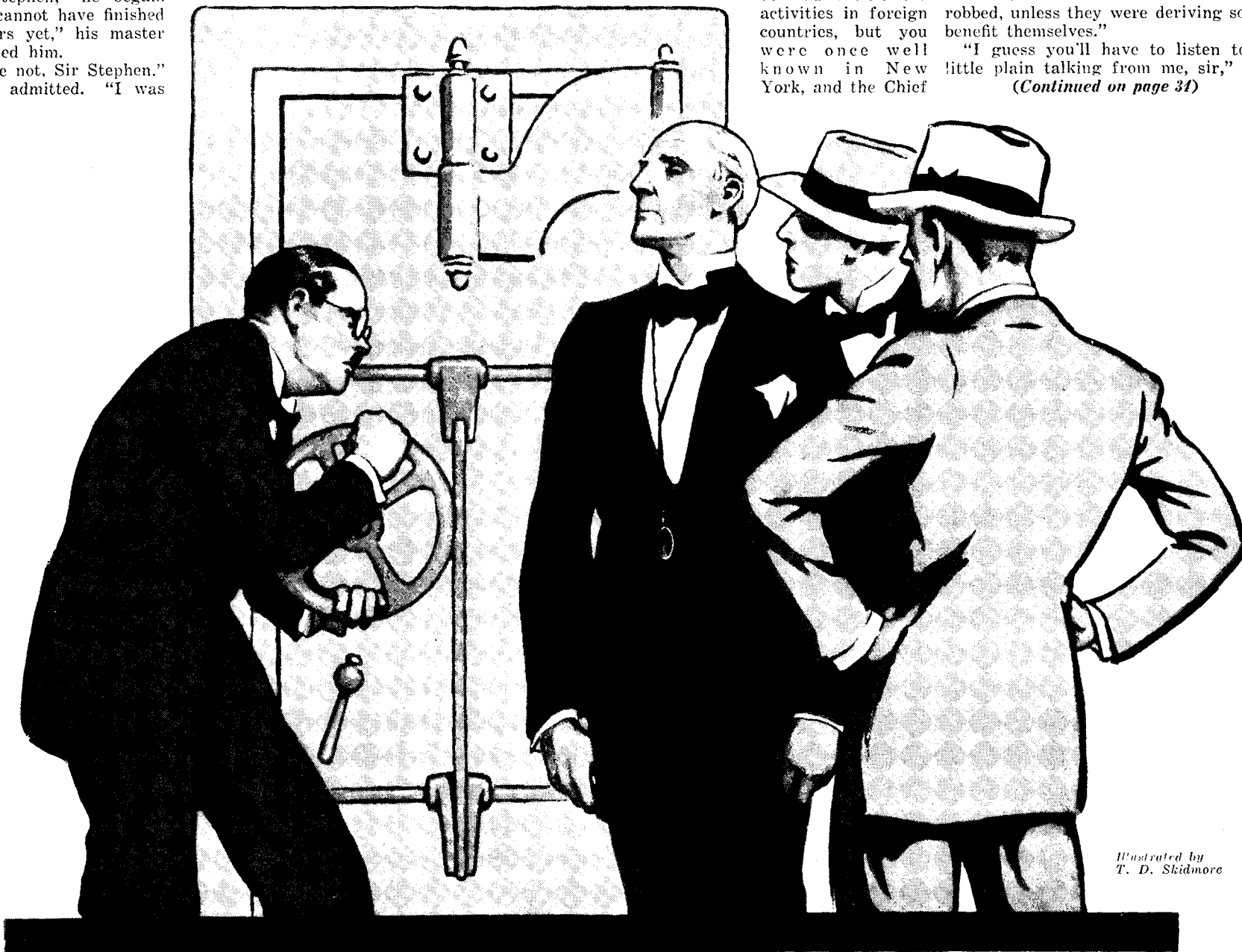
"SAY, I'd like you to understand this," my friend," the Inspector broke in. "I'm not here for the good of my health, nor am I wasting a lot of money to amuse myself. In the course of our investigations, we discovered that a notorious criminal, who is also the most accomplished burglar in existence, had accepted a large sum from a syndicate to come over here and rob you. No one has anything to gain by stopping it. So far as my personal feelings are concerned, I should even prefer to let the matter slide. If you would kindly bear that in mind, this conversation might go a little more smoothly."

Sir Stephen adjusted an enormous monocle, which he seldom used, and stared at the speaker. When he let it fall, he drew a little sigh.

"You certainly remind me of the years I spent in New York," he admitted. "The only trouble is, if I may say so, I never knew an American private individual, or an American institution, to interfere to save an outsider from being robbed, unless they were deriving some benefit themselves."

"I guess you'll have to listen to a little plain talking from me, sir," the

(Continued on page 31)



Illustrated by
T. D. Skidmore

"Stand quite clear of the door until I have touched the switch," Martin begged

A Ship comes in

A play behind a play—the dramatic story of Eugénie Leontovich, principal actress in Grand Hotel

By Alexander Woolcott

THE seasons come and go, the old favorites shuffle into the wings to be seen no more, the statisticians prove sternly that—what with the talkies and the radio already here and television on its way—the poor old theater is on its last legs. All play-going gaffers the world around will tell you that neither the winters nor the actors are as severe as they used to be. It is generally agreed—the deploring on this subject has been steadily in progress for something more than two thousand years—that the drama is in a state of decline. Even the theater, itself, emits an occasional hollow groan of foreboding. But on all its great occasions the moribund institution seems obtusely unaware that the life has gone out of it. And for those who love it there are, on each first night, portents of its eternal renewal.

The air is full of such portents in that brief, breathless, even magical moment when the signal is given to snuff out the lights in the house, the festive murmur of an arriving audience subsides into a hum which fills the dusk of the auditorium with expectancy, the rays from hidden lamps are focused on the stage and the curtain rises.

I think even the most casual passer-by must catch the suspense of that pregnant moment, must know that countless hopes are rising in that anxious twilight like incense from an altar, like prayers from a heart. To the people of the theater, the drama of those hopes and fears adds an invisible fourth dimension to the mere make-believe play on the stage. To them the stage on any first night is a lighted crossroads at which there converge paths of destiny that may have led to it from the four corners of the world.

Once in a Lifetime—

They know, these people of the theater, that standing in the wings at that very moment, perhaps, is one who is crossing himself furtively because this chance has come to him only after heart-breaking years of hopes deferred. In another second he will hear his cue and go on with trembling knees to meet his great occasion. If he meets it magnificently, then his name enters forthwith into the legend of Broadway, the watchers in the gallery learn afresh that the longest lane does have a turning, and hope is rekindled in the myriad hall bedrooms where the oblivious city lodges those who are biding their time.

In each of the past two seasons the outstanding success brought in a ship which had ridden such seas that only the most fantastic of optimists could ever have expected it to reach port. Last year, with the production of the still-triumphant *Green Pastures*, we saw a drama come true for an old man who



had wanted all his life to go on the stage. He was born in Ontario of runaway slaves who had made their way across the kindly frontier by the mercies of the underground railway. Even as a boy, he was stage-struck. But his people had no dramatic literature, no theater of their own. For a long time it seemed that his passionate ambition would have to be satisfied with the imitations of Booth and Barrett whereby he used to entertain the passengers in his days as a Pullman porter.

Later, he taught elocution (may Heaven forgive him!), gave recitations, presided over amateur dramatics. Then, years after his old dream had died within him, chance sent him on a two-weeks' visit to New York just at the time when the despairing author of *The Green Pastures* was looking for someone to play the Lord God Jehovah. How fortunate that chance was all those know who have seen the benignity and the delicate tact he brings to a rôle for which all the years of his tribulation now seem only to have been preparing him.

How slim that chance was all those know who have watched the fruitless efforts of the management to find a second Jehovah for a second company. If Chicago must wait interminably for *The Green Pastures* it is because the miracle has not yet been repeated. No second chance has brought the likes of Richard Harrison to knock at the stage door. But why should any hopeful, watching from the gallery, give up his hope when he remembers that Harrison's ship did not come in until his sixty-sixth year?

A Box-Office Stampede

Then consider in this current season the tumultuous success of the crowded and eventful play called *Grand Hotel*, a melodrama imported from Berlin. In a season when so many managers have been explaining that people just don't seem to go to the theater at all any more, a stampede took place at the box office the morning after *Grand Hotel* opened, and there was still a dogged queue there at last accounts. Before long, *Grand*

Hotel itself will join the ephemera of other seasons in the limbo of forgotten plays. But those who see it will not soon forget the exquisite performance which a Russian actress brings to the rôle of a fading ballerina. After the première in New York, there was a lavish distribution of glory to all concerned, but the largest share was allotted to her.

Each year the freedom of New York seems to be bestowed like a decoration upon some newcomer. In that sense, this season the city belongs to Eugénie Leontovich. Yet only nine years ago she was a terrified, penniless refugee from Moscow, her people slain, her career in ruins, her prospect desolate beyond words to tell.

People who have passed through such a valley of despair as the little feet of Leontovich were destined to tread in the third decade of this century have haunted faces all their lives. Sometimes a chance word will stir intolerable memories and throng the space behind her chair with ghosts. When I hear such a blundering word spoken, I find myself aching with sympathy, not for her, at all, but for the forlorn fugitive she used to be. I find myself wishing that some obliging Hindu mystic could arrange for me to run back through the garden of time just long enough to have a word with that white-faced wraith of a woman who, disguised as a peasant girl, worked her perilous, heartsick way through the Bolshevik lines to some refuge in Persia. If I found her standing forlorn by some dusty roadside, I would like to pat her

(Continued on page 56)