

'The best tale of its kind since *Dracula*'

James Hilton, *Daily Telegraph*

DENNIS WHEATLEY



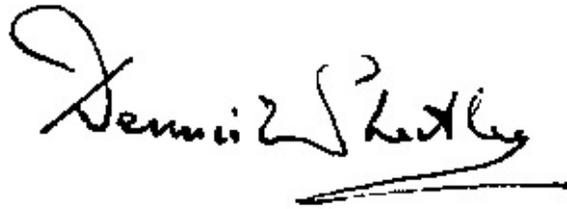
THE DEVIL RIDES OUT

BLOOMSBURY READER

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT

Dennis Wheatley

Edited by Miranda Vaughan Jones

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis Wheatley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent flourish at the end of the name. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the signature.

B L O O M S B U R Y R E A D E R

L O N D O N · N E W D E L H I · N E W Y O R K · S Y D N E Y

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT

To my old friend Mervyn Baron of whom, in these days, I see far too little but whose companionship, both in good times and in bad, has been to me a never-failing joy.

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A Note on the Author

Author's Note

I desire to state that I, personally, have never assisted at, or participated in, any ceremony connected with Magic – Black or White.

The literature of occultism is so immense that any conscientious writer can obtain from it abundant material for the background of a romance such as this.

In the present case I have spared no pains to secure accuracy of detail from existing accounts which describing magical rites or formulas for protection against evil, and these have been verified by conversation with certain persons, sought out for that purpose, who are actual practitioners of the Art.

All the characters and the situations in this book are entirely imaginary but, in the inquiry necessary to the writing of it, I found ample evidence that Black Magic is still practised in London, and other cities, to the present day.

Should any of my readers incline to a serious study of the subject, and thus come into contact with a man or a woman of Power, I feel that it is only right to urge them, most strongly, to refrain from being drawn into the practise of the Secret Art in any way. My own observations have led me to an absolute conviction that to do so would bring them into dangers of a very real and concrete nature.

Dennis Wheatl

Introduction

Dennis Wheatley was my grandfather. He only had one child, my father Anthony, from his first marriage to Nancy Robinson. Nancy was the youngest in a large family of ten Robinson children and she had a wonderful zest for life and a gaiety about her that I much admired as a boy brought up in the dull Seventies. Thinking about it now, I suspect that I was drawn to a young Ginny Hewett, a similar bubbly character, and now my wife of 27 years, because she resembled Nancy in many ways.

As grandparents, Dennis and Nancy were very different. Nancy's visits would fill the house with laughter and mischievous gossip, while Dennis and his second wife Joan would descend like minor royalty, all children expected to behave. Each held court in their own way but Dennis was the famous one with the famous friends and the famous stories.

There is something of the fantasist in every storyteller, and most novelists writing thrillers see themselves in their heroes. However, only a handful can claim to have been involved in actual daring deeds. Dennis saw action both at the Front, in the First World War, and behind a desk in the Second. His involvement informed his writing and his stories, even those based on historical events, held a notable veracity that only the life-experienced novelist can obtain. I think it was this element that added the important plausibility to his writing. This appealed to his legions of readers who were in that middle ground of fiction, not looking for pure fantasy nor dry fact, but something exciting, extraordinary, possible and even probable.

There were three key characters that Dennis created over the years: The Duc de Richleau, Gregory Sallust and Roger Brook. The first de Richleau stories were set in the years between the wars, when Dennis had started writing. Many of the Sallust stories were written in the early days of the Second World War, shortly before Dennis joined the Joint Planning Staff in Whitehall, and Brook was cast in the time of the French Revolution, a period that particularly fascinated him.

He is probably always going to be associated with Black Magic first and foremost, and it's true that he plugged it hard because sales were always good for those books. However, it's important to remember that he only wrote eleven Black Magic novels out of more than sixty bestsellers, and readers were just as keen on his other stories. In fact, invariably when I meet people who ask if there is any connection, they tell me that they read 'all his books'.

Dennis had a full and eventful life, even by the standards of the era he grew up in. He was expelled from Dulwich College and sent to a floating navel run school, HMS Worcester. The conditions on this extraordinary ship were Dickensian. He survived it, and briefly enjoyed London at the pinnacle of the Empire before war was declared and the fun ended. That sort of fun would never be seen again.

He went into business after the First World War, succeeded and failed, and stumbled into writing. It proved to be his calling. Immediate success opened up the opportunity to read and travel, fueling yet more stories and thrilling his growing band of followers.

He had an extraordinary World War II, being one of the first people to be recruited into the select team which dreamed up the deception plans to cover some of the major events of the war such as Operation Torch, Operation Mincemeat and the D-Day landings. Here he became familiar with not only the people at the very top of the war effort, but also a young Commander Ian Fleming, who was later to write the James Bond novels. There are indeed those who have suggested that Gregory Sallust

was one of James Bond's precursors.

The aftermath of the war saw Dennis grow in stature and fame. He settled in his beautiful Georgian house in Lymington surrounded by beautiful things. He knew how to live well, perhaps without regard for his health. He hated exercise, smoked, drank and wrote. Today he would have been bullied by wife and children and friends into giving up these habits and changing his lifestyle, but I'm not sure he would have given in. Maybe like me, he would simply find a quiet place.

Dominic Wheatley, 2013

The Devil Rides Out

The Incomplete Reunion

The Duke de Richleau and Rex Van Ryn had gone in to dinner at eight o'clock, but coffee was not served till after ten.

An appetite in keeping with his mighty frame had enabled Van Ryn to do ample justice to each well-chosen course and, as was his custom each time the young American arrived in England, the Duke had produced his finest wines for this, their reunion dinner at his flat.

A casual observer might well have considered it a strange friendship, but despite their difference of age and race, appearance and tradition, a real devotion existed between the two.

Some few years earlier Rex's foolhardiness had landed him in a Soviet prison, and the elderly French exile had put aside his peaceful existence as art connoisseur and dilettante to search for him in Russia. Together they had learned the dangerous secret of 'The Forbidden Territory' and travelled many thousand versts pursued by the merciless agents of the OGPU.

There had been others too in that strange adventure; young Richard Eaton, and the little Princess Marie Lou whom he had brought out of Russia as his bride; but as Rex accepted a long Hoyo of Monterrey from the cedar cabinet, which the Duke's man presented to him, his thoughts were not of the Eatons, living now so happily with their little daughter Fleur in their lovely country home. He was thinking of that third companion whose subtle brain and shy, nervous courage had proved so great an aid when they were hunted like hares through the length and breadth of Russia, the frail, narrow-shouldered Englishman, Simon Aron.

'What could possibly have kept Simon from being with them tonight?' Rex was wondering. He had never failed before to make these reunion dinners, and why had the Duke brushed aside his inquiries about him in such an offhand manner? There was something odd behind De Richleau's reticence, and Rex had a feeling that for all his host's easy charm and bland, witty conversation something had gone seriously wrong.

He slowly revolved some of the Duke's wonderful old brandy in a bowl-shaped glass, while he watched the servant preparing to leave the room. Then, as the door closed, he set it down and addressed De Richleau almost abruptly.

'Well, I'm thinking it's about time for you to spill the beans.'

The Duke inhaled the first cloud of fragrant smoke from another of those long Hoyos and answered guardedly. 'Had you not better tell me, Rex, to what particular beans you refer?'

'Simon of course! For years now the three of us have dined together on my first night, each time I've come across, and you were too mighty casual to be natural when I asked about him before dinner. Why isn't he here?'

'Why, indeed, my friend?' the Duke repeated, running the tips of his fingers down his lean, handsome face. 'I asked him, and told him that your ship docked this morning, but he declined to honour us tonight.'

'Is he ill then?'

'No, as far as I know he's perfectly well. At all events he was at his office today.'

'He must have had a date then that he couldn't scrap, or some mighty urgent work. Nothing else could induce him to let us down on one of these occasions. They've become, well, in a way, almost sacred to our friendship.'

'On the contrary he is at home alone tonight. He made his apologies of course, something about resting for a Bridge Tournament that starts ...'

‘Bridge Tournament my foot!’ exclaimed Rex angrily. ‘He’d never let that interfere between us three. It sounds mighty fishy to me. When did you see him last?’

‘About three months ago.’

‘What! But that’s incredible. Now look here!’ Rex thrust the onyx ashtray from in front of him, and leaned across the table. ‘You haven’t quarrelled, have you?’

De Richleau shook his head. ‘If you were my age, Rex, and had no children, then met two young men who gave you their affection, and had all the attributes you could wish for in your sons, how would it be possible for you to quarrel with either of them?’

‘That’s so, but three months is a whale of a while for friends who are accustomed to meet two or three times a week. I just don’t get this thing at all, and you’re being a sight too reticent about it. Come on now, what do you know?’

The grey eyes of piercing brilliance which gave such character to De Richleau’s face, lit up. ‘That,’ he said suddenly, ‘is just the trouble. I don’t *know* anything.’

‘But you fear that, to use his own phrase, Simon’s “in a muddle—a really nasty muddle” eh? Are you a little hurt that he hasn’t brought his worry to you.’

‘To whom else should he turn if not to one of us—and you were in the States.’

‘Richard maybe, he’s an even older friend of Simon’s than we are.’

‘No. I spent last weekend at Cardinals Folly and neither Richard nor Marie Lou could tell me anything. They haven’t seen him since he went down to stay last Christmas and arrived with a dozen crates of toys for Fleur.’

‘How like him!’ Rex’s gargantuan laugh rang suddenly through the room. ‘I might have known the trunkful I brought over would be small fry if you and Simon have been busy on that child.’

‘Well I can only conclude that poor Simon is “in a muddle” as you say, or he would never treat us all like this.’

‘But what sort of a muddle?’ Rex brought his leg-of-mutton fist crashing down on the table angrily. ‘I can’t think of a thing where he wouldn’t turn to us.’

‘Money,’ suggested the Duke, ‘is the one thing that with his sensitive nature he might not care to discuss with even his closest friends.’

‘I doubt it being that. My old man has a wonderful opinion of Simon’s financial ability and he handles a big portion of our interests on this side. I’m pretty sure we’d be wise to it if he’d burned his fingers on the market. It sounds as if he’d gone bats about some woman to me.’

De Richleau’s face was lit by his faintly cynical smile for a moment. ‘No,’ he said slowly. ‘A man in love turns naturally to his friends for congratulation or sympathy as his fortune with a woman proves good or ill. It can’t be that.’

For a little the two friends sat staring at each other in silence across the low jade bowl with its trailing sprays of orchids: Rex, giant shouldered, virile and powerful, his ugly, attractive, humorous young face clouded with anxiety; the Duke, a slim, delicate-looking man, with slender, fragile hands and greying hair, but with no trace of weakness in his fine, distinguished face. His aquiline nose, broad forehead and grey ‘devil’s’ eyebrows might well have replaced those of the cavalier in the Van Dyck that gazed down from the opposite wall. Instead of the conventional black, he wore a claret-coloured vicuna smoking suit, with silk lapels and braided fastenings; this touch of colour increased his likeness to the portrait. He broke the silence suddenly.

‘Have you by any chance ever heard of a Mr Mocata, Rex?’

‘Nope. Who is he anyway?’

‘A new friend of Simon’s who has been staying with him these last few months.’

‘What, at his Club?’

~~‘No—no, Simon no longer lives at his Club. I thought you knew. He bought a house last February, a big, rambling old place tucked away at the end of a cul-de-sac off one of those quiet residential streets in St John’s Wood.’~~

‘Why, that’s right out past Regent’s Park, isn’t it? What’s he want with a place out there where there are any number of nice little houses to let in Mayfair?’

‘Another mystery, my friend.’ The Duke’s thin lips creased into a smile. ‘He *said* he wanted a garden, that’s all I can tell you.’

‘Simon! A garden!’ Rex chuckled. ‘That’s a good story I’ll say. Simon doesn’t know a geranium from a fuchsia. His botany is limited to an outsized florist’s bill for bunching his women friends from the shops, and why should a bachelor like Simon start running a big house at all?’

‘Perhaps Mr Mocata could tell you,’ murmured De Richleau mildly, ‘or the servant that he had imported.’

‘Have you ever seen this bird, Mocata I mean?’

‘Yes, I called one evening about six weeks ago. Simon was out so Mocata received me.’

‘And what did you make of him?’

‘I disliked him intensely. He’s a pot-bellied, bald-headed man of about sixty, with large protuberant, fishy eyes, limp hands, and a most unattractive lisp. He reminded me of a large white slug.’

‘What about this servant that you mention?’

‘I only saw him for a moment when he crossed the hall, but he reminded me in a most unpleasant way of the Bogey Man with whom I used to be threatened in my infancy.’

‘Why, is he a black?’

‘Yes. A Malagasy I should think.’

Rex frowned. ‘Now what in heck is that?’

‘A native of Madagascar. They are a curious people, half-Negro and half-Polynesian. This great brute stands about six foot eight, and the one glimpse I had of his eyes made me want to shoot him on sight.’

‘Do you know any more about these people?’ asked Rex grimly.

‘Not a thing.’

‘Well, I’m not given to worry, but I’ve heard quite enough to get me scared for Simon. He’s in some jam or he’d never be housing people like that.’

The Duke gently laid the long, blue-grey ash of his cigar in the onyx ashtray. ‘There is not a doubt,’ he said slowly, ‘that Simon is involved in some very big business, but I have been stifling my anxiety until your arrival. You see I wanted to hear your views before taking the very exceptional step of, you know, *butting in*, is the expression, on the private affairs of even so intimate a friend. The question is now—what are we to do?’

‘Do!’ Rex thrust back his chair and drew himself up to his full magnificent height. ‘We’re going up to that house to have a little heart-to-heart talk with Simon—right now!’

‘I’m glad you feel like that’, said De Richleau quietly, ‘because I ordered the car for half past ten. Shall we go?’

The Curious Guests of Mr Simon Aron

As De Richleau's Hispano drew up at the dead end of the dark cul-de-sac in St John's Wood, Rex slipped out of the car and looked about him. They were shut in by the high walls of neighbouring gardens. Above a blank expanse of brick in which a single, narrow door was visible, the upper stories of Simon's house showed vague and mysterious among whispering trees.

'Ugh!' he exclaimed with a little shudder as a few drops splashed upon his face from the dark branches overhead. 'What a dismal hole, we might be in a graveyard.'

The Duke pressed the bell, and turning up the sable collar of his coat against a slight drizzle which made the April night seem chill and friendless, he stepped back to get a better view of the premises. 'Hello! Simon's got an observatory here,' he remarked. 'I didn't notice that on my previous visit.'

'So he has.' Rex followed De Richleau's glance to a dome that crowned the house, but at that moment an electric globe suddenly flared into life about their heads, and the door in the wall swung open disclosing a sallow-faced manservant in dark livery.

'Mr Simon Aron?' inquired De Richleau, but the man was already motioning them to enter, so they followed him up a short covered path and the door in the wall clanged behind them.

The vestibule of the house was dimly lit, but Rex, who never wore a coat or hat in the evening, noticed that two sets of outdoor apparel lay, neatly folded, on a long console table as the silent footman relieved De Richleau of his wraps. Evidently, Simon had other visitors.

'Maybe Mr Aron's in conference and won't want to be disturbed,' he said to the sallow-faced servant with a sudden feeling of guilt at their intrusion. Perhaps, after all, their fears for Simon were quite groundless and his neglect only due to a prolonged period of intense activity on the markets, but the man only bowed and led them across the hall.

'The fellow's a mute,' whispered the Duke. 'Deaf and dumb I'm certain.' As he spoke the servant flung open a couple of large double doors and stood waiting for them to enter.

A long, narrow room, opening into a wide salon, stretched before them. Both were decorated in the lavish magnificence of the Louis Seize period, but for the moment the dazzling brilliance of the lighting prevented them taking in the details of the parquet floors, the crystal mirrors, the gilded furniture and beautifully wrought tapestries.

Rex was the first to recover and with a quick intake of breath he clutched De Richleau's arm. 'E Jove she's here!' he muttered almost inaudibly, his eyes riveted on a tall, graceful girl who stood some yards away at the entrance of the salon talking to Simon.

Three times in the last eighteen months he had chanced upon that strange, wise, beautiful face, with the deep eyes beneath heavy lids that seemed so full of secrets, and gave the lovely face a curious ageless look.

He had seen her first in a restaurant in Budapest; months later again, in a traffic jam when his car was wedged beside hers in New York; and then, strangely enough, riding along a road with three men in the countryside around Buenos Aires. How extraordinary that he should find her here, and what luck.

De Richleau's glance was riveted upon their friend. With an abrupt movement, Simon turned towards them. For a second he seemed completely at a loss, his full, sensual mouth hung open to twice its normal extent and his receding jaw almost disappeared behind his white tie. His dark eyes were filled with amazement and something suspiciously like fear, but he recovered almost instantly and his old smile flashed out as he came forward to greet them.

‘My dear Simon,’ the Duke’s voice was a silken purr, ‘how can we apologise for breaking in on you like this?’

‘Sure, we hadn’t a notion you were throwing a party,’ boomed Rex, his glance following the girl who had moved off to join another woman and three men who were talking together in the inner room.

‘But I’m delighted,’ murmured Simon genially. ‘Delighted to see you both. Only got a few friends. Meeting of a little society I belong to, that’s all.’

‘Then we couldn’t dream of interrupting you, could we Rex?’ De Richleau demurred with well-assumed innocence.

‘Why, certainly not, we wouldn’t even have come in if that servant of yours hadn’t taken us for some other folks you’re expecting.’ But despite their apparent unwillingness to intrude, neither of the two made any gesture of withdrawal and, mentally, De Richleau gave Simon full marks for the way in which he accepted their obviously unwelcome presence.

‘I’m most terribly sorry about dinner tonight,’ he was proclaiming earnestly. ‘Meant to rest for my bridge, I simply have to these days, to be any good. Even forgot till six o’clock that I had these people coming.’

‘How fortunate for you, Simon, that your larder is so well stocked.’ The Duke could not resist the gentle dig as his glance fell on a long buffet spread with a collation which would have rivalled the cold table in any great hotel.

‘I ‘phoned Ferraro,’ parried Simon glibly. ‘The Berkeley never lets me down. Would have asked you to drop in, but... er, with this meeting on I felt you’d be bored.’

‘Bored! Not a bit, but we are keeping you from your other guests.’ With an airy gesture De Richleau waved his hand in the direction of the inner room.

‘Sure,’ agreed Rex heartily, as he laid a large hand on Simon’s arm and gently propelled him towards the salon. ‘Don’t you worry about us, we’ll just take a glass of wine off you and fade away.’ His eyes were fixed again on the pale oval face of the girl.

Simon’s glance flickered swiftly towards the Duke who ignored, with a guileless smile, his obvious reluctance for them to meet his other friends, and noted with amusement that he avoided any proper introduction.

‘Er—er—two very old friends of mine,’ he said, with his little nervous cough as he interchanged a swift look with a fleshy, moon-faced man whom De Richleau knew to be Mocata.

‘Well, well, how nice,’ the bald man lisped with unsmiling eyes. ‘It is a pleasure always to welcome any friends of Simon’s.’

De Richleau gave him a frigid bow and thought of reminding him coldly that Simon’s welcome was sufficient in his own house, but for the moment it was policy to hide his antagonism so he replied politely that Mocata was most kind, then, with the ease which characterised all his movements, he turned his attention to an elderly lady who was seated near by.

She was a woman of advanced age but fine presence, richly dressed and almost weighed down with heavy jewellery. Between her fingers she held the stub of a fat cigar at which she was puffing vigorously.

‘Madame.’ The Duke drew a case containing the long Hoyos from his pocket and bent towards her. ‘Your cigar is almost finished, permit me to offer you one of mine.’

She regarded him for a moment with her bright eyes, then stretched out a fat, beringed hand. ‘Thank you, Monsieur, I see you are a connoisseur.’ With her beaked, parrot nose she sniffed at the cigar appreciatively. ‘But I ‘ave not seen you at our other meetings, what ees your name?’

‘De Richleau, Madame, and yours?’

‘De Richleau! a maestro indeed.’ She nodded heavily. ‘Je suis Madame D’Urfé, you will ‘ave heard of me.’

‘But certainly.’ The Duke bowed again. ‘Do you think we shall have a good meeting tonight?’

‘If the sky clears we should learn much,’ answered the old lady cryptically.

‘Ho! Ho!’ thought the Duke. ‘We are about to make use of Simon’s observatory it seems. Good, let us learn more.’ But before he could pump the elderly Frenchwoman further, Simon deftly interrupted the conversation and drew him away.

‘So you have taken up the study of the stars, my friend,’ remarked the Duke as his host led him to the buffet.

‘Oh, er, yes. Find astronomy very interesting, you know. Have some caviare?’ Simon’s eyes flickered anxiously towards Rex, who was deep in conversation with the girl.

As he admired her burnished hair and slumbrous eyes, for a moment the Duke was reminded of a Botticelli painting. She had, he thought, that angel look, the golden virgin to the outward eye whose veins were filled with unlit fire. A rare cinquecento type who should have lived in the Italy of the Borgias. Then he turned again to Simon. ‘It was because of the observatory then that you acquired this house, I suppose?’

‘Yes. You must come up one night and we’ll watch a few stars together.’ Something of the old warmth had crept into Simon’s tone and he was obviously in earnest as he offered the invitation, but the Duke was not deceived into believing that he was welcome on the present occasion.

‘Thank you, I should enjoy that,’ he said promptly, while over Simon’s shoulder he studied the other two men who made up the party. One, a tall, fair fellow, stood talking to Mocata. His thin, flaxen hair brushed flatly back, and whose mysterious, light eyes proclaimed him an Albino; the other, a stout man dressed in a green plaid and ginger kilt, was walking softly up and down with his hands clasped behind his back, muttering to himself inaudibly. His wild, flowing white hair and curious costume suggested an Irish bard.

‘Altogether a most unprepossessing lot,’ thought the Duke, and his opinion was not improved by the three new arrivals. A grave-faced Chinaman wearing the robes of a Mandarin, whose eyes betrayed a cold, merciless nature: a Eurasian with only one arm, the left, and a tall, thin woman with a scraggy throat and beetling eyebrows which met across the bridge of her nose.

Mocata received them as though he were the host, but as the tall woman bore down on Simon he promptly left the Duke, who guessed that the move was to get out of earshot. However, the lady’s greeting in a high-pitched, Middle Western accent came clearly to him.

‘Well, Simon, all excitement about what we’ll learn tonight? It should help a heap, this being your natal conjunction.’

‘Ha! Ha!’ said De Richleau to himself. ‘Now I begin to understand a little and I like this party even less.’ Then, with the idea of trying to verify his surmise, he turned towards the one-armed Eurasian but Simon, apparently guessing his intention, quickly excused himself to the American woman, and cut off the Duke’s advance.

‘So, my young friend,’ thought De Richleau, ‘you mean to prevent me from obtaining any further information about this strange gathering, do you? All right! I’ll twist your tail a little,’ and he remarked sweetly:

‘Did you say that you were interested in Astronomy or Astrology, Simon? There is a distinct difference you know.’

‘Oh, Astronomy, of course,’ Simon ran a finger down his long nose. ‘It is nice to see you again. Have some more champagne?’

‘Thank you, no, later perhaps.’ The Duke smothered a smile as he caught Mocata, who had overheard him, exchange a quick look with Simon.

‘Wish this were an ordinary meeting,’ Simon said, a moment later, with an uneasy frown. ‘Then I’d ask you to stay, but we’re going through the Society’s annual balance-sheet tonight, and you and Rex, not being members, you know ...’

‘Quite, quite, my dear fellow, of course,’ De Richleau agreed amicably, while to himself he thought. ‘That’s a nasty fence young sly-boots has put up for me, but I’ll be damned if I go before I find out for certain what I came for’. Then he added in a cheerful whisper: ‘I should have gone before, but Rex seems so interested in the young woman in green, I want to give him as long as possible.’

‘My dear chap,’ Simon protested, ‘I feel horribly embarrassed at having to ask you to go at all.’

A fat, oily-looking Babu in a salmon-pink turban and gown had just arrived and was shaking hands with Mocata; behind him came a red-faced Teuton, who suffered the deformity of a hare lip.

Simon stepped quickly forward again as the two advanced, but De Richleau once more caught the first words which were snuffled out by the hare-lipped man.

‘Well, Abraham, wie geht es?’ Then there came the fulsome chuckle of the fleshy Indian. ‘You must not call him that, it is unlucky to do so before the great night.’

‘The devil it is!’ muttered the Duke to himself, but Simon had left the other two with almost indecent haste in order to rejoin him, so he said with a smile: ‘I gather you are about to execute De Poll, my friend?’

‘Eh!’ Simon exclaimed with a slight start.

‘To change your name,’ De Richleau supplemented.

‘Ner.’ He shook his head rapidly as he uttered the curious negative that he often used. It came of his saying ‘No’ without troubling to close the lips of his full mouth. ‘Ner—that’s only a sort of joke we have between us, a sort of initiation ceremony, I’m not a full member yet.’

‘I see, then you have ceremonies in your Astronomical Society, how interesting!’

As he spoke De Richleau, out of the corner of his eye, saw Mocata make a quick sign to Simon and then glance at the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece; so to save his host the awkwardness of having actually to request his departure, he exclaimed: ‘Dear me! Twenty past eleven, I had no idea it was so late. I must drag Rex away from that lovely lady after all, I fear.’

‘Well, if you must go.’ Simon looked embarrassed and worried, but catching Mocata’s eye again he promptly led the way over to his other unwelcome guest.

Rex gave a happy grin as they came up. ‘This is marvellous Simon. I’ve been getting glimpses of this lady in different continents these two years past, and she seems to recall having seen me too. It’s just great that we should become acquainted at last through you.’ Then he smiled quickly at the girl. ‘May I present my friend De Richleau? Duke, this is Miss Tanith.’

De Richleau bent over her long, almost transparent hand and raised it to his lips. ‘How unfortunate I am,’ he said with old-fashioned gallantry, ‘to be presented to you only in time to say good-bye, and perhaps gain your displeasure by taking your new friend with me as well.’

‘But,’ she regarded him steadily out of large, clear, amber eyes. ‘Surely you do not depart before the ceremony?’

‘I fear we must. We are not members of your, er, Circle you see, only old friends of Simon’s.’

A strange look of annoyance and uncertainty crept into her glance, and the Duke guessed that she was searching her mind for any indiscretions she might have committed in her conversation with Rex. Then she shrugged lightly and, with a brief inclination of the head which dismissed them both, turned coldly away.

The Duke took Simon's arm affectionately, as the three friends left the salon. 'I wonder,' he said persuasively, 'if you could spare me just two minutes before we go—no more I promise you.'

'Rather, of course.' Simon seemed now to have regained his old joviality. 'I'll never forgive myself for missing your dinner tonight—this wretched meeting—and I've seen nothing of you for weeks. Now Rex is over we must throw a party together.'

'We will, we will,' De Richleau agreed heartily, 'but listen; is not Mars in conjunction with Venus tonight?'

'Ner,' Simon replied promptly. 'With Saturn, that's what they've all come to see.'

'Ah, Saturn! My Astronomy is so rusty, but I saw some mention of it in the paper yesterday, and one time I was a keen student of the Stars. Would it be asking too much, my dear fellow, to have just one peep at it through your telescope? We should hardly delay your meeting for five minutes.'

Simon's hesitation was barely perceptible before he nodded his bird-like head with vigorous assent. 'Um, that's all right, they haven't all arrived yet, let's go up.' Then, with his hands thrust deep in the trouser pockets of his exceedingly well-cut suit, he led them hurriedly through the hall and up three flights of stairs.'

De Richleau followed more slowly. Stairs were the one thing which ruffled his otherwise equable temper and he had no desire to lose it now. By the time he arrived in the lofty chamber, with Rex behind him, Simon had all the lights switched on.

'Well you've certainly gone in for it properly,' Rex remarked as he surveyed the powerful telescope slanting to the roof and a whole arsenal of sextants, spheres and other astrological impedimenta ranged about the room.

'It's rather an exact science you see,' Simon volunteered.

'Quite,' agreed the Duke briefly. 'But I wonder, a little, that you should consider charts of the Macrocosm necessary to your studies.'

'Oh, those!' Simon shrugged his narrow shoulders as he glanced around the walls. 'They're only for fun—relics of the Alchemistic nonsense in the Middle Ages, but quite suitable for decoration.'

'How clever of you to carry out your scheme of decoration on the floor as well.' The Duke watched thoughtfully regarding a five-pointed star enclosed within two circles between which numerous mystical characters in Greek and Hebrew had been carefully drawn.

'Yes, good idea, wasn't it?' Simon tittered into his hand. It was the familiar gesture which both his friends knew so well, yet somehow his chuckle had not quite its usual ring.

The silence that followed was a little awkward, and in it, all three plainly heard a muffled scratching noise that seemed to come from a large wicker basket placed against the wall.

'You've got mice here, Simon,' said Rex casually, but De Richleau had stiffened where he stood. Then, before Simon could bar his way, he leapt towards the hamper and ripped open the lid.

'Stop that!' cried Simon angrily, and dashing forward he forced it shut again, but too late, for within the basket the Duke had seen two living pinioned fowls—a black rooster and a white hen.

With a sudden access of bitter fury he turned on Simon, and seizing him by his silk lapels, shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. 'You fool,' he thundered. 'I'd rather see you dead than monkeying with Black Magic.'

The Esoteric Doctrine

‘Take... take your hands off me,’ Simon gasped.

His dark eyes blazed in a face that had gone deathly white and only a superhuman effort enabled him to keep his clenched fists pressed to his sides.

In another second he would have hit the Duke but Rex, a head taller than either of them, laid his mighty hand on the shoulder of each and forced them apart.

‘Have a heart now, just what is all this?’ His quiet, familiar voice, with its faint American intonation, sobered the others immediately. De Richleau swinging on his heel, strode to the other side of the observatory where he stood for a moment, with his back towards them, regaining control of his emotions.

Simon, panting a little, gave a quick, nervous wriggle of his bird-like head and smoothed out the lapels of his evening coat.

‘Now, I’ll tell you,’ he said jerkily, ‘I never asked either of you to come here tonight, and even my oldest friends have no right to butt in on my private affairs. I think you’d better go.’

The Duke turned, passing one hand over his greying hair. All trace of his astonishing outburst had disappeared and he was once more the handsome, distinguished figure that they knew so well.

‘I’m sorry, Simon,’ he said gravely. ‘But I felt as a father might who sees his child trying to pick live coals out of the fire.’

‘I’m not a child,’ muttered Simon, sullenly.

‘No, but I could not have more affection for you if you were actually my son, and it is useless now to deny that you are playing the most dangerous game that has ever been known to mankind throughout the ages.’

‘Oh, come,’ a quick smile spread over Rex’s ugly, attractive face. ‘That’s a gross exaggeration. What’s the harm if Simon wants to try out a few old parlour games?’

‘Parlour games!’ De Richleau took him up sharply. ‘My dear Rex, I fear your prowess in aeroplanes and racing cars hardly qualifies you to judge the soul destroying powers of these ancient cults.’

‘Thanks. I’m not quite a half-wit, and plenty of spiritualistic séances take place in the States, but I’ve never heard of anyone as sane as Simon going bats because of them yet.’

Simon nodded his narrow head slowly up and down. ‘Of course Rex is right, and you’re only making a mountain out of a molehill.’

‘As you like,’ De Richleau shrugged. ‘In that case will you permit us to stay and participate in your operations tonight?’

‘Ner, I’m sorry, but you’re not a member of our Circle.’

‘No matter. We have already met most of your friends downstairs, surely they will not object to our presence on just this one occasion?’

‘Ner.’ Simon shook his head again. ‘Our number is made up.’

‘I see, you are already thirteen, is that it? Now listen, Simon.’ The Duke laid his hands gently on the young man’s shoulders. ‘One of the reasons why my friendship with Rex and yourself has developed into such a splendid intimacy, is because I have always refrained from stressing my age and greater experience, but tonight I break the rule. My conscious life, since we both left our schools, has been nearly three times as long as yours and, in addition, although I have never told you of it, I made a deep study of these esoteric doctrines years ago when I lived in the East. I beg of you, as I have nev

begged for anything in my life before, that you should give up whatever quest you are engaged upon and leave this house with us immediately.'

For a moment Simon seemed to waver. All his faith in De Richleau's judgment, knowledge, and love for him urged him to agree, but at that moment Mocata's musical lisping voice cut in upon the silence, calling from the landing just below:

'Simon, the others have come. It is time.'

'Coming,' called Simon, then he looked at the two friends with whom he had risked his life in the 'Forbidden Territory.' 'I can't,' he said with an effort, 'You heard, it's too late to back out now.'

'Then let us remain, please,' begged the Duke.

'No, I'm sorry.' A new firmness had crept into Simon's tone, 'but I must ask you to go now.'

'Very well.'

De Richleau stepped forward as though to shake hands then, with almost incredible swiftness, his arm flew back and next second his fist caught Simon a smashing blow full beneath the jaw.

The action was so sudden, so unexpected, that Simon was caught completely off his guard. For a fraction of time he was lifted from his feet, then he crashed senseless on his back and slid sprawling across the polished floor.

'Have you gone crazy?' Rex exploded.

'No, we've got to get him out of here, save him from himself, don't argue! Quick!' Already De Richleau was kneeling by the crumpled body of his friend.

Rex needed no further urging. He had been in too many tight corners with the Duke to doubt the wisdom of his decisions however strange his actions might appear. In one quick heave he dragged Simon's limp form across his shoulders and started for the stairs.

'Steady!' ordered the Duke. 'I'll go first and tackle anyone who tries to stop us. You get him to the car, understood?'

'What if they raise the house? You'll never be able to tackle the whole bunch on your own?'

'In that case drop him. I'll get him out somehow while you protect my rear. Come on!'

With De Richleau leading they crept down the first flight of stairs. On the landing he paused and peered cautiously over the banisters. No sound came from below. 'Rex,' he whispered.

'Yep.'

'If that black servant I told you of appears, for God's sake don't look at his eyes. Watch his hands and hit him in the belly.'

'O.K.'

A moment later they were down the second flight. The hall was empty and only a vague murmur of conversation came to them from behind the double doors that led to the salon.

'Quick!' urged the Duke. 'Mocata may come out to look for him any moment.'

'Right,' Rex, bent double beneath his burden, plunged down the last stairs, and De Richleau was already halfway across the hall when the dumb servant suddenly appeared from the vestibule.

For a second he stood there, his sallow face a mask of blank surprise then, side-stepping the Duke with the agility of a rugby forward, he lowered his bullet head and charged Rex with animal ferocity.

'Got you,' snapped De Richleau, for although the man had dodged with lightning speed he had caught his wrist in passing. Then, flinging his whole weight upon it as he turned, he jerked the fellow clean off his feet and sent him spinning, head-first against the wall.

As his head hit the panelling the mute gave an uncouth grunt and rolled over on the floor, but he staggered up again and dashed towards the salon. Rex and the Duke were already pounding down the tiled path and in another second they had flung themselves into the lane through the entrance in the

garden wall.

'Thank God,' gasped the Duke as he wrenched open the door of the Hispano. 'I believe that hellish crew would have killed us rather than let us get Simon out of there alive.'

'Well, I suppose you do know what you're doing,' Rex muttered as he propped Simon up on the back seat of the car. 'But I'm not certain you're safe to be with.'

'Home,' ordered De Richleau curtly to the footman, who was hiding his astonishment at the sudden exit by hastily tucking the rug over their knees. Then he smiled at Rex a trifle grimly. 'I suppose I do seem a little mad to you, but you can't possibly be expected to appreciate what a horribly serious business this is. I'll explain later.'

In a few moments they had left the gloom of the quiet streets behind and were once more running through well-lit ways towards Mayfair, but Simon was still unconscious when they pulled up in Curzon Street before Errol House.

'I'll take him,' volunteered Rex. 'The less the servants have to do with this the better,' and picking up Simon in his strong arms as though he was a baby, he carried him straight upstairs to the first floor where De Richleau's flat was situated.

'Put him in the library,' said the Duke, who had paused to murmur something about a sudden illness to the porter, when he arrived on the landing a moment later. 'I'll get something to bring him round from the bathroom.'

Rex nodded obediently, and carried Simon into a room in the Curzon Street flat, memorable for the unique collection of rare and beautiful objects which it contained. A Tibetan Buddha seated upon the Lotus; bronze figurines from ancient Greece; beautifully chased rapiers of Toledo steel, and Moorish pistols inlaid with turquoise and gold; ikons from Holy Russia set with semi-precious stones and curiously carved ivories from the East.

As Rex laid Simon upon the wide sofa he glanced round him with an interest unappeased by his hundred visits, at the walls lined shoulder high with beautifully bound books, and at the lovely oil colour prints, interspersed with priceless historical documents and maps, which hung above them.

De Richleau, when he joined him, produced a small crystal bottle which he held beneath Simon's nose. 'No good trying to talk to him tonight,' he remarked, 'but I want to bring him round sufficiently to put him to sleep again.'

Rex grunted. 'That sounds like double-dutch to me.'

'No. I mean to fight these devils with their own weapons, as you will see.'

Simon groaned a little, and as his eyes flickered open the Duke took a small round mirror from his pocket. 'Simon,' he said softly, moving the lamp a little nearer, 'look upward at my hand.'

As he spoke De Richleau held the mirror about eighteen inches from Simon's forehead and a little above the level of his eyes, so that it caught and reflected the light of the lamp on to his lids.

'Hold it lower,' suggested Rex. 'He'll strain his eyes turning them upwards like that.'

'Quiet,' said the Duke sharply. 'Simon, look up and listen to me. You have been hurt and have a troubled mind, but your friends are with you and you have no need to worry any more.'

Simon opened his eyes again and turned them upwards to the mirror, where they remained fixed.

'I am going to send you to sleep, Simon,' De Richleau went on softly. 'You need rest and you will be awake free from pain. In a moment your eyes will close and then your head will feel better.'

For another half-minute he held the mirror steadily reflecting the light upon Simon's retina, then he placed the first and second fingers of his free hand upon the glass with his palm turned outward and made a slow pass from it towards the staring eyes, which closed at once before he touched them.

'You will sleep now,' he continued quietly, 'and you will not wake until ten o'clock tomorrow.'

morning. Directly you awake you will come straight to me either here or in my bedroom and you will speak to no one, nor will you open any letter or message which may be brought to you, until you have seen me.'

De Richleau paused for a moment, put down the mirror and lifted one of Simon's arms until it stood straight above his head. When he released it the arm did not drop but remained stiff and rigid in the air.

'Most satisfactory,' he murmured cheerfully to Rex. 'He is in the second stage of hypnosis already and will do exactly what he is told. The induction was amazingly easy, but of course, his half-conscious state simplified it a lot.'

Rex shook his head in disapproval. 'I don't like to see you monkey with him like this. I wouldn't allow it if it was anyone but you.'

'A prejudice based upon lack of understanding, my friend. Hypnotism in proper hands is the greatest healing power in the world.' With a quick shrug the Duke moved over to his desk and unlocking one of the lower drawers, took something from it, then he returned to Simon and addressed him in the same low voice.

'Open your eyes now and sit up.'

Simon obeyed at once and Rex was surprised to see that he looked quite wide awake and normal. Only a certain blankness about the face betrayed his abnormal state, and he displayed no aversion. De Richleau extended the thing he had taken from the drawer. It was a small golden swastika set with precious stones and threaded on a silken ribbon.

'Simon Aron,' the Duke spoke again. 'With this symbol I am about to place you under the protection of the power of Light. No being or force of Earth, or Air, of Fire, or Water can harm you while you wear it.'

With quick fingers he knotted the talisman round Simon's neck and went on evenly: 'Now you will go to the spare bedroom. Ring for my man Max and tell him that you are staying here tonight. He will provide you with everything you need and, if your throat is parched from your recent coma, ask him for any soft drink you wish, but no alcohol remember. Peace be upon you and about you. Now go.'

Simon stood up at once and looked from one to the other of them. 'Good night,' he said cheerfully with his quick natural smile. 'See you both in the morning,' then he promptly walked out of the room.

'He... he's not really asleep is he?' asked Rex, looking a little scared.

'Certainly, but he will remember everything that has taken place tomorrow because he is not in the deep somnambulistic state where I could order him to forget. To achieve that usually takes a little practice with a new subject.'

'Then he'll be pretty livid I'll promise you. Fancy hanging a Nazi swastika round the neck of a professing Jew.'

'My dear Rex! Do please try and broaden your outlook a little. The swastika is the oldest symbol of wisdom and right thinking in the world. It has been used by every race and in every country at some time or other. You might just as well regard the Cross as purely Christian, when we all know it was venerated in early Egypt, thousands of years before the birth of Christ. The Nazis have only adopted the swastika because it is supposed to be of Aryan origin and part of their programme aims at welding together a large section of the Aryan race. The vast majority of them have no conception of its esoteric significance and even if they bring discredit upon it, as the Spanish Inquisition did upon the Cross, that could have no effect upon its true meaning.'

'Yes, I get that, though I doubt if it'll make any difference to Simon's resentment when he finds it round his neck tomorrow. Still, that's a minor point. What worries me is this whole box of tricks that you've been pulling off this evening. I've got a feeling you ought to be locked up as downright insane, unless it's me.'

De Richleau smiled. 'A strange business to be happening in modern London, isn't it? But let's make a drink and talk it over quietly.'

'Strange! Why, if it were true it would be utterly fantastic, but it's not. All this hoocha about Black Magic and talking hocus-pocus while you hang silly charms round Simon's neck is utter bunk.'

'It is?' The Duke smiled again as he tipped a lump of ice into Rex's glass and handed it to him. 'Well, let's hear *your* explanation of Simon's bizarre behaviour. I suppose you do consider that'

'Of course, but nothing like as strange as you're trying to make out. As I see it Simon's taken up with spiritualism or something of the kind and plenty of normal earnest people believe in that, but you know what he is when he gets keen on a thing, everything else goes to the wall and that's why he has neglected you a bit.'

'Then this evening he was probably sick as mud to miss our dinner, but had a séance all fixed that he couldn't shelve at the last moment. We butt in on his party, and naturally he doesn't care to admit what he's up to is in any way odd, so he spins a yarn about it being an astronomical society. So you know who've read a sight too many books, and seem to have stored up all the old wives' tales your nurse told you in your cradle, get a bee in your bonnet and slog the poor mut under the jaw.'

De Richleau nodded. 'I can hardly expect you to see it any other way at the moment, but let's start at the beginning. Do you agree that after knocking him out I called into play a supernormal power in order to send him cheerfully off to bed without a single protest?'

'Yes, even the doctors admit hypnotic influence now, and Simon would never have stood for you tying that swastika under his chin if he'd been conscious.'

'Good. Then at least we are at one on the fact that certain forces can be called into play which the average person does not understand. Now, if instead of practising that comparatively simple exercise in front of you, I had done it before ignorant natives, who had never heard of hypnotism, they would term it magic, would they not?'

'Sure.'

'Then go a step further. If, by a greater exertion of the same power, I levitated, that is to say, lifted myself to a height of several inches from this floor, you might not use the word *magic* but you would class that feat in the same category as the ignorant native would place the easier one, because it is something which you have always thought impossible.'

'That's true.'

'Well, I am not sufficient of an adept to perform the feat, but will you accept my assurances that I've seen it done, not once, but a number of times?'

'If you say so, but from all I've heard about such things, the fellows you saw didn't leave the ground at all. It is just mass hypnotism exercised upon the whole audience, like the rope trick.'

'As you wish, but that explanation does not rob me of my point. If you admit that I can tap a hitherto unknown power to make Simon obey my will, and that an Eastern mystic can tap that power to the full extent of making a hundred people's eyes deceive them into believing that he is standing on thin air, you admit that there *is* a power and that it can be tapped in greater degrees according to the knowledge and proficiency of the man who uses it.'

'Yes, within limits.'

'Why within limits? You apparently consider levitation impossible, but wouldn't you have considered wireless impossible if you had been living fifty years ago and somebody had endeavoured to convince you of it?'

'Maybe.' Rex sat forward suddenly. 'But I don't get what you're driving at. Hypnotism is only a demonstration of the power of the human will.'

‘Ah! There you have it. The *will to good* and the *will to evil*. That is the whole matter in a nutshell. ~~The human will is like a wireless set and properly adjusted—trained that is—it can tune in with the~~ invisible influence which is all about us.’

‘The *Invisible Influence*. I’ve certainly heard that phrase somewhere before.’

‘No doubt. A very eminent mental specialist who holds a high position in our asylums wrote a book with that title and I have not yet asked you to believe one tenth of what he vouches for.’

‘Then I wonder they haven’t locked him up.’

‘Rex! Rex!’ De Richleau smiled a little sadly. ‘Try and open your mind, my friend. Do you believe in the miracles performed by Jesus Christ?’

‘Yes.’

‘And of His Disciples and certain of the Saints?’

‘Sure, but they had some special power granted to them from on high.’

‘Exactly! *Some Special Power*. But I suppose you would deny that Gautama Buddha and his disciples performed miracles of a similar nature?’

‘Not at all. Most people agree now that Buddha was a sort of Indian Christ, a Holy Man, and no doubt he had some sort of power granted to him too.’

The Duke sat back with a heavy sigh. ‘At last my friend we seem to be getting somewhere. If you admit that miracles, as you call them although you object to the word magic, have been performed by two men living in different countries hundreds of years apart, and that even their disciples were able to tap a similar power through their holiness, you cannot reasonably deny that other mystics have also performed similar acts in many portions of the globe—and therefore, that there is a power existing outside us which is not *peculiar to any religion*, but can be utilised if one can get into communication with it.’

Rex laughed. ‘That’s so, I can’t deny it.’

‘Thank God! Let’s mix ourselves another drink shall we, I need it?’

‘Don’t move, I’ll fix it.’ Rex good-naturedly scrambled to his feet. ‘All the same,’ he added slowly, ‘it doesn’t follow that because a number of good men have been granted supernatural powers that there is anything in Black Magic.’

‘Then you do not believe in Witchcraft?’

‘Of course not, nobody does in these days.’

‘Really! How long do you think it is since the last trial for Witchcraft took place?’

‘I’ll say it was all of a hundred and fifty years ago.’

‘No, it was in January, 1926, at Melun near Paris.’

‘Oh! You’re fooling!’ Rex exclaimed angrily.

‘I’m not,’ De Richleau assured him solemnly. ‘The records of the court will prove my statement, so you see you are hardly accurate when you say that *nobody* believes in Witchcraft in these days, and many many thousands still believe in a personal devil.’

‘Yes, simple folk maybe, but not educated people.’

‘Possibly not, yet every thinking man must admit that there is still such a thing as the power of Evil.’

‘Why?’

‘My dear fellow, all qualities have their opposites, like love and hate, pleasure and pain, generosity and avarice. How could we recognise the goodness of Jesus Christ, Lao Tze, Ashoka, Marcus Aurelius, Francis of Assisi, Florence Nightingale and a thousand others if it were not for the evil lives of Herod, Caesar Borgia, Rasputin, Landru, Ivan Kreuger and the rest?’

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