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lars. "The fool is coming along!" he groaned. "But he sha'n't come aboard! Not a step!"

"Keep your hair on," enjoined his companion, heedless of the futility of the metaphor. "The tarpaulins are still on the machine. It looks as much like a guncarriage as an aeroplane. Buckley wouldn't recognize it if he did come aboard. But he won't. I'll head them off and go back to the yacht. If Page keeps to his cabin—"

Saccarello shambled hastily toward the deck. "By all means he'll keep to his cabin!" he snapped. "Surely your wife won't have been so indiscreet as to mention him."

IN the immediate sequel, however, the first intelligible word he seized of the parley that Justin on the ladder held with the intruders in the launch, was the name of the aviator. Thereupon the American, pale and staring, wheeled about and caught sight of him.

"Page!" he gasped. "For God's sake get Page!"

The hooked beak vanished as if potted by some unseen sharpshooter; but an instant later Saccarello reappeared at the top of the gangway and began hobbling down to them.

"I must ask an explanation," he said stiffly, with the slightest possible recognition of Buckley's existence. "If this call—"

"Have you sent for Page?" interrupted Justin, his face working.

"Certainly not!"

The distraught man groaned and would have brushed by him, but the Italian's frail body revealed unexpected strength.

"I must know to what extent outsiders share our private business," he stated, blocking the way.

Justin threw up his hands. "This is no time for red tape," he cried. "Nobody wants to pry into things. My wife and Buckley have brought bad news. That man Rodoslav has mixed himself up with some revolutionary plot and dragged my niece into it too."

"A plot! Rodoslav!" Saccarello's heavy lids fluttered. "Who is responsible for this tale?"

"Buckley here can vouch for it."

"Ah, Mr. Buckley!" drawled the old man, "Pardon the skepticism of a veteran, but—"

"Stow your skepticism!" cut in Justin. "It doesn't matter whether you believe it or not. The important fact is that Rodoslav has carried my niece off in his aeroplane, and—"

"Is that all?"

"All!"

"It's hardly sufficient to justify this commotion. Your niece is an American—with an American young woman's notions of propriety. She has ridden with Prince Rodoslav before."

"In an aerodrome, at a civilized hour, not from a ramshackle castle in the Balkans. They started from that place of his you pointed out to me yesterday as we came by, started before anybody was up. The girl's life is in danger—"

"Surely not," Saccarello shed a beatific smile. "Isn't it plain that the young people have taken it into their heads to elope? They are both romantic. An aeroplane elopement would have an appeal to them that you and I, my friend, can scarcely appreciate."

"You're puffing away time!" Justin's square chin asserted itself. "We have got to find them, and Page must help us. He's the only one who can help us. There's a chance, if he flies back into the Hertaogovina—"

"Over Austrian territory! In a machine belonging to my Government!"

"But you don't understand—"

"I understand only too well. The gravest complications might come of it. I may seem hard hearted, but a girl's caprice—"

"Caprice!" roared Justin. "I tell you she has been decoyed into a nest of revolutionists! Buckley knows what he is talking about. Do you want affidavits, documents? My God, man! haven't you any human feelings? Are you just parchment and red tape?"

Buckley saw fit to intervene. "As to evidence," he said, fixing the Italian's reluctant eye at last. "I think I can satisfy Baron Saccarello. I have not been in the diplomatic service long, but still long enough to have reason to know—"

"That I am merely cautious, not stubborn," interposed the pupil of Cavour, who recognized trump cards by instinct and proposed to give Buckley no chance to blurt out unwelcome truths in this company. "Your word will suffice, sir. I waive my objections. If the affair should stir up Vienna, I shall find some means to smooth it over. Madam, let me give you a hand over the gangway."

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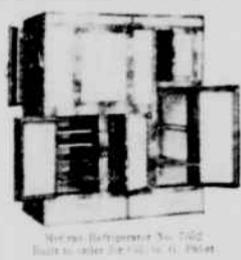
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