

missed from the service of Marevell, as I have told you.

I had only a small amount of money at my command and my first idea was of going east, where I had business friends. The thought of Naomi deterred me. While her latest action had clearly repelled me, yet I could not readily forget her. As I left the Marevell mansion I tried to fathom the cause of the drastic action of its owner. Suspicion seemed to be the impelling motive of his behavior; but why in my case? I was aware that he had been the victim, as a countryman of wealth, of that mysterious league of villains known as the "Black Band." I had seen their letters menacing him, demanding a large amount of money as blackmail or his life. Outside of the usual sordid motive of personal gain of these schemers I had heard that Marevell was especially detested by these especial members of the league on account of some political differences reaching back to his former career in Italy.

Always on guard against these malevolent plotters, generally viewing them with contempt instead of fear, was it possible Marevell suspected me as a possible spy in their interest? Further, was it probable that he had imparted these suspicions to his wife, who in turn had communicated them to Naomi?

I dwelt strongly, mentally, on this phase of the situation. Several times during the ensuing week I hovered about the Marevell place. I caught sight of Naomi only once. She was in the garden. I lifted my hat. She bowed in return, sadly. I thought, and went into the house. I was aggrieved, disappointed; but at least she did not betoken her former coldness.

I had just finished a promenade past the house one evening when a sinister-faced man of foreign cast swung along by my side. He was specious and insinuating in his address. After dwelling upon a few in-

different, everyday comments, he eyed me keenly.

"Had I better say something in my mind I had to speak?" he inquired, craftily.

"Why not?" I submitted.

"Very well. I know who you are—Adrian Noble, recently the victim of a whim of the hard tyrant in yonder, Luigi Marevell."

"I was his secretary once, yes," I admitted.

"You cannot feel very kindly toward him. If I should tell you that the nipping in the bud of a vast political conspiracy in which Marevell is involved is our object, and a thousand dollars cash will be yours for a trifle of co-operation, what would you say?"

I had my clue in an instant. I feigned the resentment toward my employer which the stranger sought to fan into a flame of rancour and vengeance. To make a long story short, I pretended blindly to accord with the designs of the man and his accomplices, to whom he later introduced me.

What he wanted of me was a practical use of the intimate knowledge I had of the interior of the Marevell home and the ways of its inmates. There were certain papers in the library they wished to secure, they represented. A burglarious entrance was necessary. I feigned interest and willing co-operation in their plans, expecting, sooner or later, to learn the full extent of their motives until the critical moment arrived, acting upon the same when they least expected it.

Thus it was that one night I found myself with the trio in the cellar of the Marevell home. I had not intended to allow affairs to go so far without warning Marevell, but it was too late to do that now. One of the men left us in the cellar and ascended into the upper portion of the house. He returned speedily, waving a package of papers.

"Safe!" he announced, in malevo-