

# The Spider's Touch

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**BWARE** of an engine that overheats. It wastes power. It shortens the life of your car. It leads to expensive trouble and repair bills. A clogged radiator is a needless worry. Sani-Flush cleans out rust and sediment . . . unclogs the delicate veins that prevent overheating.

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And don't forget that grass *must* have eleven different food elements from the soil. Lack of even one of these results in a thinner growth, giving weeds an easy entry.

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prison camp for anyone who breathed a word about Fane. I thought it was a hopeless task — until tonight."

"You have something?"  
"Something or nothing. The water on the floor where Fane had his room is a Frenchman and for the four days I've been here I've been nursing him, taking him out in his free time, standing him drinks. He's scared stiff but tonight at a dance hall we visited together, Jules talked."

"And?"  
"The night Fane disappeared, Jules was on duty on Fane's floor. Fane rang for a whiskey. Jules brought it. It was past eleven o'clock and Fane was at the telephone. Jules heard him say, 'I'll come right away!' and then he repeated the name of the street 'Lotsen-Kai' . . ."

"Lotsen-Kai?"  
"Wait!" Fane said then. "Hold on! I'll write it down!" and signed to Jules to give him a pencil, and he wrote on the menu which was beside the telephone. Jules was curious because he knew that the Lotsen-Kai was a street in St. Pauli, down by the old port, a very low quarter and he wondered what a rich young American like Fane could want there in the middle of the night. So he looked over Fane's shoulder and saw he had written 'Café Helga.' The next moment Fane had torn off the piece of paper, seized his coat and hat, his bag, and dashed from the room!"

"What is this place?"  
"It's a sailors' dive down on the water front in St. Pauli, the corner of the Lotsen-Kai and the Teer-gasse — Ole Jansen's place, they call it."

Dallas had drawn an automatic from his pocket and was verifying the magazine. Then he laid down his hat and took from a drawer a cap and an electric torch. "You go to investigate?" said Wolf.

"You bet," Dallas answered.  
"It's a rough quarter," Wolf observed. "I think I'll come with you. I'll take a morning train to Berlin." Wolf moved to the door. "Better we don't leave the hotel together. Meet me at the corner of the Jungfernstieg in five minutes. I'll have a cab."

"Have you a gun with you?"  
The other tapped his pocket significantly and crept out.

The rain was relentless. In a thousand dancing knives it beat down upon the worn cobbles of the quay. The bracket lamp at the corner, illuminating the sign 'Lotsen-Kai,' guttered in its ring of haze to the savage buffeting of the wind. In the flickering light of the corner lamp they read the sign over the ramshackle building that made the angle of the quay: 'Café Helga. Inhaber Ole Jansen.'

The café was one-storied, with a single dormer window above, and it was dark. The time was twenty minutes to one and, at first, they thought the place had closed for the night. But as soon as they entered the street, they were aware of its abandoned air, with every window shuttered and the board covering the door placarded with tattered, weather-beaten posters flapping in the wet. They tried the door. It was fast.

Round the angle of the house a door with a window beside it was visible. Dallas tested the door; it held. With a knife he drew from his pocket, he fumbled for a moment with the window fastening, then noiselessly lowered the upper half. "Shut it behind you!" he whispered and disappeared inside the house.

A fetid kitchen brought them to a dance-room, with an opening in the further wall and a line of recesses curtained with festoons of artificial vines. A short passage, with a stair mounting

from it, led to the café proper, with the main entrance and a line of shattered windows giving on the street. The air was dank and evil-smelling; out of the inky blackness beyond the range of their flashlights, the squeak and scamper of rats came to their ears.

"There's nothing here," said Dallas. "Keep your ears open — I'm going upstairs."

The narrow flight led straight up to a bedroom under the eaves, so tiny that Dallas's flashlight revealed the details in a single sweep — a camp bed with a table beside it, a wash-bowl stand, a row of empty hooks against the wall. The bed had not been slept in, but there was a depression on the pillow as though someone had rested there.

He was poking about the room when his ear caught a sound from below, a single, dull crash, followed by silence. Two stealthy strides brought him to the staircase. Wolf was a lanky shadow at the foot, facing the closed door leading to the café. Dallas tiptoed carefully down the steps to join Wolf. For a moment all was still, then a rim of light showed under the door and in the deathly hush both men heard the rhythmic tap of a stick, the clump of a limping foot.

Dallas breathed a single word. "Clubfoot!" Silently pointing backward, he began to tiptoe along the passage to the dance-room. There they crept into one of the curtained recesses and waited.

The door gaped. In the café, out of their range of vision, a steady light now burned; in its dispersed glow, Dallas and his companion saw that a man of huge proportions stood there. He was enveloped in some dark, voluminous ulster and carried his hat; the massive head, set on the bull neck and shorn to the scalp, showed a triangle of bristles, iron-gray and wiry, that glistened in the dim radiance. For a breathless moment the figure lingered, shaven poll cocked at a watchful angle; then it slowly veered about and, with tapping stick, hobbled laboriously back into the café. The misshapen boot encasing the right foot was plainly visible; its hollow thump echoed through the silence after he was out of sight.

The thump ceased and a deep and guttural voice, speaking German, rolled along the passage.

"Gr-r, how the cold strikes home! You haven't brought me here on a fool's errand, have you, you dog?"

In a servile tone another voice replied. "I obeyed the Herr Doktor to the letter. I was over at the dance-hall within a little quarter of an hour of Irma's calling you, and I never lost sight of him all the way back to the Astoria. . . ."

Dallas groped for Wolf's hand and gripped it tensely. "I was close behind him," the voice went on, "in the shadow of the newspaper kiosk when he joined his friend at the corner of the Jungfernstieg and I heard him asking the taxi-driver if he knew the Lotsen-Kai. I came across to you at the Wein-Stube at once. . . ."

"And let their cab get away, sapristi!"

"We weren't five minutes behind them. We're here first, that's all!"

"How did he get on to the Café Helga in the first place?"

A nervous laugh. "I don't have to tell the Herr Doktor — the American secret service is very efficient!"

Back in the stuffy darkness of their recess, Wolf was aware that the figure at his side had gone suddenly rigid. "How do you know they're not here already?" the harsh voice boomed.

"As the Herr Doktor saw, the door was locked; the windows are fast too. . . ."

"There's a back door, isn't there, Schafskopf?"

In their hiding-place the two men were taut with suspense as a flashlight shone down the passage. "There's no one in the place," they heard the emissary report.

A soft whisper rustled in Wolf's ear. "Quiet and follow me!" Dallas went gliding away through the kitchen. He pushed down the window by which they had entered and leaned forth. "The coast seems to be clear. Out

with you!" he bade his companion.

They climbed through the window and went round the side of the house. The rain had ceased and all was quiet outside. Under the corner lamp Dallas stopped. "Did you get that?" he whispered to Wolf. "They take us for the Feds. Come on!"

"Where are we going?"  
"Inside, of course. He's expecting visitors, isn't he?"

"But why must we go in from outside?"

"Because he mustn't guess we've been in already — I can't stop to explain now. The important thing to remember — but only if we can't help giving our names — is that I'm George Brewer and you're his friend and colleague, Clarence Wilson."

"Wait!" Wolf was peering round the corner of the house. "I see no car — how did he get here?"

"Perhaps he sent his car off, as we did, and walked. Or came by boat."

"But how did he enter the house?"

"By the front door, of course."  
Wolf shook his head. "I would have heard him — I was only in the passage, not a dozen yards away. The first I knew there were voices in the house, but rather faint, and I shut the door quickly. After that, there was a sort of thud; but I heard no door open. I tell you."

"What does it matter? Come on!" Dallas led the way round to the front. No light was visible through the closed shutters. He laid his hand resolutely on the latch and the door swung open.

A rumbling voice said in English, "Good evening, gentlemen!"

A hanging lamp shed its smoky radiance upon a man so massively built that his chair all but disappeared beneath the spread of that gigantic body. Paunched and flabby, but with the hint of tremendous power in the muscular development of the barrel chest and the disproportionately long arms, he sat silently regarding the intruders from under extravagantly tufted eyebrows; his hands, large and hairy; folded on the crutch-handle of his stick; the right foot, shod in its monstrous boot, slightly drawn back.

It was a forbidding face, ape-like in its structure, the nose flat and broad with cavernous nostrils, the mouth a gash parting coarse and cruel lips; while the eyes burned with an uncertain fire that spoke of excesses of rage, sudden and uncontrollable. He was fantastically hirsute, with hands and cheekbones darkly thatched and little tendrils of hair sprouting at the nostrils and the ungainly protruding ears.

He said ingratiatingly, in excellent English. "Might I ask you to have the goodness to come inside? Hans, shut the door!" A thick-set individual, who emerged from behind the bar drew the door to without a sound.

"Would you leave our guests standing? Chairs, Esel!"

They sat down and silently, the big man jerked his head towards the passage as a sign to his underling to withdraw. He emitted a cackling laugh. "Well, shall I give you a lead? You're American secret service men, are you not?"

The eyes, sharply vigilant, were never still, as though on the alert to pluck from the shadows beyond the circle of light any shape that lurked there. While he talked he seemed to be listening, too, his large head cocked at an angle. Squatted in his chair, his chin sunk on his weighty chest above the ample paunch, he was like some giant spider waiting for its prey.

"And if we are?" said Dallas.

"You've been to the Hamburg police about Fane, *nicht wahr?* To the Gestapo in Berlin too, I heard?" He snapped his fingers airily. "Let's see, how was your name again?"

Dallas laughed. "What does it matter? It would be an alias, anyway!"

The German grunted. "You've come here in search of a certain packet, *nicht wahr?* Well, you'll not find it at the Café Helga — no, not within five hundred miles of it!"

"So I gather," Dallas replied imperturbably. "Our people in Brussels are negotiating with your man, Bartels, about it, aren't they?"

An indignant snort broke from the

cavernous chest. "Ja, and would you believe it, your State Department has had the effrontery to suggest that the plans we offered might be fakes?"

"Why not?" said Dallas casually. "It strikes me as a good suggestion!"

The Herr Doktor did not take this pleasantry amiss. "Pardon me, I have my reputation to consider," he pointed out with dignity. "With every Power in the world busily increasing its armaments, military information is to-day a commodity like anything else, and I'm the largest wholesaler in the field. At seventy-five thousand dollars those plans are dirt cheap and your people know it. At this very moment I could name another government which is prepared to pay handsomely for them."

"Then why not sell to them?"

Grundt's mouth closed with a snap. "Because those plans are worth more to yours." One elbow propped on his thigh, he leaned forward. "Why not get authority from Washington to handle the matter? We shan't quarrel about terms and listen," — his eyes were mere slits — "I'll take care of you two in the way of commission." He prodded the Englishman's leg with his stick. "What do you say?"

"Not interested," was the curt answer. "We want Fane; where is he?"

The tufted eyebrows came down swiftly. "Fane?" Grundt echoed suspiciously. "Why do you want Fane?"

"Our job is to turn him over to the folks back home for trial."

"Why bother about Fane? Those plans are more important surely."

"Orders are orders, that's why! If you want to do business with us, Doctor, we must have the facts. Now, we know you got the plans from Fane — the question is, how? Did he sell them to you, or what?"

"Say rather," the German observed, "that he bartered them for a pair of rosy lips!" He smiled seraphically.

"Meaning the Lassagne woman?"  
The hot eyes were mocking. "Ei, ei, junger Herr, you know all my little secrets!"

"How did Fane come to this job?"

Grundt simpered gently. "You'd better ask the lady."

"It's you I'm asking. Did he meet his Jap here?"

The German shrugged. "As it happens, I was delayed on my way here. The police were displaying inconvenient curiosity as to my movements that night, and when I arrived, the gentleman in question had already taken his departure."

"What gentleman? The Jap, is it? Where did he go?"

Grundt shook his head. "I can't tell you. Jansen could, I daresay, but he was nabbed in the raid."

"Raid? What raid?"

"The police. Looking for me." His tone was mild. "Scarcely had I arrived when they descended upon the place."

"What became of Fane and the woman?"

"They got away, thanks to me."

"And where did they go?"

He shrugged. "Where do lovers go? Cannes, Capri, Villa d'Este. . . ."

Dallas looked at him hard — the German's eyes were polite and friendly. "We have only your word for it," Dallas remarked. "You claim a woman wheeled the plans away from him; but a tap on the head would have done as well!"

The other smiled. "You wouldn't say that if you'd ever seen her. *Entzückend!*" He kissed the tips of his fingers gaily. "But very expensive." He chuckled.

"As to that," said Dallas, "money meant nothing to Fane. His family is one of the richest in the United States!"

"*Donnerwetter!*" Grundt seemed impressed, frowning to himself. "I take it, since you two gentlemen have your orders to apprehend the young man, that the State Department is convinced of his guilt?"

"Absolutely," Dallas replied, "and we're relying on your help to find him."

"Tchah!" said the big man airily. "The matter is not so simple as you think. I have long since dismissed the young man and his inamorata from my mind and, to tell you the truth, at the present moment I haven't the least idea where they may be!"

The words died on his lips. Then he was out of his chair, kicking it out of his way with his crippled foot and

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