

JUGGERNAUT

How Mystery and Greed, Love and Hate, Gathered Around the Hearth of a Nobleman on the Sunny Riviera—Gathered Beneath the Shadow of a Destroyer Invisible, Inescapable, Immeasurably Frightful . . . Begin This Thrilling Daily Serial Today!

BY
ALICE CAMPBELL

WHEN Esther rang the bell of Numero 86 Route de Grasse she felt within her that pleasant sort of stage fright—a mixture of dread and exhilaration—which one is apt to experience when venturing into the unknown. The thrill might be out of all proportion to the prosaic character of her mission—for what is there exciting in applying for a job as a doctor's assistant?—yet there was no gainsaying the fact that when this door confronting her opened, anything, everything might happen. That is the way youth regards things.

"Opportunity—a door open in front of one." So in earlier years her Latin teacher had dilated on the inner meaning of the word. Esther smiled reminiscently and congratulated herself that she was not going tamely back to her work in America, choosing instead when she found a door open to enter and explore on the other side.

Numero 86 was a conventional and dignified villa, noncommittal in appearance, like a hundred others. Clean windows blinked in the sunshine, the doorstep was chalky white, the brass plate on the lintel glittered with the inscription, "Dr. Gregory Sartorius, M. D." Beside the gate a mimosa shook out its yellow plumage against the sky. Mimosa—in February! . . . New York, reflected Esther, was in the clutch of a blizzard. She could picture it now, with its stark ice ribbed streets, its towering buildings, a mausoleum of frozen stone and dirty snow. As for flowers—why, even a spray of that mimosa in a frosty florist's window would be absurdly expensive; one would pay . . .

"Vous desirez, mademoiselle?"

She turned with a start to find the door open, framing the squat figure of a manservant, a brigand in appearance, French of the Midi; black hair grew low on his forehead; his beetling brows met over sullen, shiny eyes which scanned her with a hostile gaze. Diffidently she mustered her all too scanty French.

"Est-ce monsieur le docteur est chez lui?" she ventured, hoping for the best.

To her relief the brigand broke into a friendly smile.

"Mademoiselle come about job?" he replied in English. "Yes, come this way, please."

He led the way through an entrance hall into a large salon of chill and gloomy aspect.

"Take a seat," he bade her, grinning cheerfully. "I go tell doctor."

The salon was plainly a reception room for patients. Looking about, Esther wondered why physicians' reception rooms were invariably so uninviting, so lacking in personality. This one was particularly drab and cold, though she could not say that it was shabby or in more than usually bad taste. It was furnished in nondescript French style, a mixture of periods, with heavy olive green curtains at the windows shutting out most of the light and pale cotton brocade on the modern Louis Seize chairs. A plaster bust of Voltaire on the mantelpiece was flanked by Louis Philippe candlesticks, the whole reflected in a gilt framed mirror extending to the ceiling.

Across the middle of the room stretched a reproduction Louis Quinze table with ormolu mounts, and on it were stacked regular piles of magazines, French and English. Everything was in meticulous order; the parquet shone with a glassy finish. From the corner a tall clock ticked loudly, deliberately. The house was very still.

SUDDENLY Esther felt uncomfortable, oppressed. Yet why? There was no reason to dread the coming interview. Indeed, she could think of no plausible explanation for the absurd panic which overtook her in a flash. Why, for a single instant she had half a mind to bolt out of the house before the doctor appeared. What utter nonsense! How ashamed she would have been! To steady herself she picked up the folded copy of the morning paper facing her and, opening it, reread the advertisement that had brought her here. It was plain and to the point:

"Dr. Gregory Sartorius of 86 Route de Grasse wishes to find a well educated young Englishwoman, trained nurse preferred, to assist him in his work. Good references essential. Applicants may call between two and four."

It sounded just the thing. Suitable jobs were not plentiful in Cannes; her three days' search had been sufficient to convince her of that fact. She hoped she would land this one; if not, it would probably mean New York again and the blizzard. She hated to be beaten.

A shadow darkened the glass doors. She sprang to her feet, slightly disconcerted to feel that the doctor had been silently inspecting her from without, perhaps for several seconds. Again she was impatient with herself for the odd suggestion of alarm which came upon her. She was not usually nervous like this.

What an immense man he was! That was her first thought as he paused for an instant in the doorway, scrutinizing her. Big and rather clumsily built, with awkward, slow movements. He had a student's stoop and his skin was brownish and dull, his whole heavy person suggesting the sedentary worker. His low forehead, receding into a bald head, was oddly flattish in shape. It reminded Esther of something—she couldn't think what. He stood with his head slightly lowered and regarded her deliberately, appraisingly, before he uttered a word. She could hear his breathing.

"Good afternoon, Miss—"

He stopped inquiringly.

"My name is Rowe. I've come about the advertisement, doctor."

He approached slowly, shaking a sort of lethargic reluctance towards effort which extended even to the muscles of his almost expressionless face. To some he might have appeared dull and stupid, but Esther knew this was not true. There was life in the flicker of his small eyes, deep set, bilious in tinge, and as she looked into them she received the impression of a great inner concentration of energy.

"You are an American, I see."

"Well, Canadian, as a matter of fact. I trained in New York."

"A nurse, then. Where did you train?"

"St. Luke's."

She thought this made a good impression.

He made a chary movement of his hand toward a chair and at the same time sank into a fragile fauteuil which creaked with his weight. He sighed, obviously bored with the prospect of the interview.

"What are you doing in France?"

"I came here as companion to a patient of mine who hates traveling alone. We stopped a week in Paris, then I brought her here, where she met some friends, with whom she went on to Algeria. It was arranged beforehand I was only to come as far as Cannes. I've been here a week now, and I was going back to New York, only—"

"Well?"



ILLUSTRATED BY GARY SHEAHAN.

Her arms were seized from behind and she felt a sharp, piercing jab in the shoulder.

Esther smiled with the complete frankness which was one of her greatest assets.

"Well, doctor, I've never been abroad before, and I may never come again. It seems so stupid, having come so far, not to stay more than two weeks. I love it here. Only in order to stay I must get some work; I can't afford to be idle."

He seemed to find this reasonable, though not interesting, glancing away from her in a bored fashion.

"I see. Now, about this place. What I want is a nurse who will be in attendance here from nine in the morning till six in the afternoon; some one thoroughly responsible, who will make appointments, do a little secretarial work, answer

the telephone, and, of course, assist when there are examinations. The usual thing."

"Yes, doctor, I understand."

"Can you typewrite?"

"A little. I'll improve with practice."

"Know French?"

"Not too well, but I mean to study."

"It's of no great consequence; most of my patients are English. How old are you?"

"I'm nearly twenty-six."

"You look younger, but no one can tell these days. Now as to references. What can you show me?"

"I have brought my certificate from the hospital, and I have my passport, of course—"

"Let me see them."

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Esther's eyes dwelt on the doctor's ugly, flattish forehead, which at once fascinated and repelled. Exactly what was it she felt about him? She was not to know until she had been drawn into a seething vortex of intrigue and crime. Follow her strange and thrilling experiences tomorrow and thereafter in *The Daily Tribune*.