

August Derleth

The Adventure of the Broken Chessman

IN JUNE of the same year in which Solar Pons examined into the singular affair of the Black Narcissus, he was sitting one evening, engaged in the compilation of his voluminous scrapbook of British crimes and criminological data, and talking desultorily of the events which passed under his eye.

"The majority of crimes are remarkably unimaginative," he said. "A body found in a little-traveled lane—a corpse in a boudoir—murder during robbery. Here, for instance," he read, "'Lodger Found Dead. Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, this morning discovered the body of a lodger dead in his room. The unfortunate man's head had been battered in, and his room had been ransacked. Mrs. Baker identified her lodger as Landon Hall. Relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.' Surely nothing could be more prosaic?" He paused thoughtfully, his hand going to the lobe of his left ear. "And yet," he went on, "'Landon Hall' is almost certainly an assumed name. One can infer as much not only by its sound but also by the patent indication that his landlady knows so little about him and his origins that 'relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.'"

"I suppose there are thousands of people who drop out of sight only to assume new identities and begin life over in some other place," I ventured.

"Elementary," murmured Pons. "It is their motives which are of primary interest."

He put the cutting away and went on to others. From time to time he read sentences from the dispatches, making brief comments on them. Ostensibly, the matter of Mrs. Ottilia Baker's murdered lodger had been forgotten. Yet it was destined to be brought again to our attention, and that before the evening was done.

It was at eight o'clock that the door bell jangled. Pons was at the moment near the window; he drew aside the curtain and looked down into Praed Street.

"Ah, we are about to have a visitor of some importance," he observed. "It may well be an invitation to another of those little adventures which you are so fond of chronicling, Parker."

He returned from the window in time to greet the tall, cloaked individual Mrs. Johnson admitted to our quarters. He came into the room somewhat diffidently, inclined his head slightly, and looked toward Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons?"

"I am at your service," answered Pons, and placed a chair for our visitor, whose voice, I could not help noticing, had a distinctly foreign accent.

Of our visitor's face, I could see very little, for his long black cloak successfully covered his chin, and his eyes were hidden by smoked glasses, attached to what appeared to be an expensive black cord which, followed downward, disappeared into the folds of his cloak at the neck. His hands were gloved, and he carried a walking-stick, which was of ebony with an ivory handle. His lips were thin and firm, his nose was sharply aquiline. His hair was jet black, and the bushy eyebrows projecting above the rims of his glasses were black, too.

"It will be necessary that my identity remain a secret, Mr. Pons; it would not be politic for my connection with the matter in question to become known."

Pons seated himself to face our visitor and inquired, without a flicker of mischief, "What is the matter in question, M. Parenin?"

Our visitor started slightly, but betrayed himself by no other sign. "Ah, you know me."

"I submit that as long as the pennant on your motor remains unaltered, any attempt at personal concealment is foredoomed to failure. The pennant suggests the Russian Consul," replied Pons. "But I daresay the matter you have come to see me about is not connected with your official status or with the official business of the government you represent."

"Not directly, Mr. Pons. That is to say, not as yet. I may at any moment receive orders from Leningrad to proceed in the matter, but thus far I am acting solely on my own initiative."

"Pray let us consider the problem, M. Parenin."

"You may have read of a Mrs. Ottilia Baker's discovering a murdered lodger at her establishment at 37 Woburn Place this morning," began Parenin crisply.

"I remember doing so. A gentleman named Landon Hall; obviously, I thought, an assumed name."

"It was not Landon Hall who was found dead, however," continued Parenin. "A description subsequently published in the

national press was called to my attention by my secretary. I recognized the victim at once as one of Russia's secret agents—a certain man, notoriously known for his shrewdness and bestiality, as well as the disturbing degree of his success in the zealous prosecution of his assignments. You will be familiar with his name, Mr. Pons—it is Pyotor Propov.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Pons. “At one time of the terrible Inner Circle; the same man who shot the aged Prince Casimir in 1918, who assassinated the children of Madame Kolosov, who decapitated the Grand Duchess Yolande—among other outrages.”

“Your information is correct, Mr. Pons. It was he whose body Mrs. Baker discovered in Landon Hall's room this morning. My secretary has viewed the body; there is no question about his identity.”

“I have little inclination to apprehend his murderer,” said Pons dryly.

Our visitor smiled. “It was not my intention to ask you to do so. It is because I desire the opposite end that I have wished my identity kept secret. Mr. Pons, I would wish you to do all in your power to so confuse the official police that they will not suspect the identity of the actual murderer!”

Pons looked his surprise and delight. “Dear me, M. Parenin! What an extraordinary request!”

“I confide in you that I never had any love for Propov or his methods; I am not alone in my convictions,” our visitor assured Pons. “Believe me, sir, I could mention many names closely associated with our government.”

Pons rested his chin briefly on his clasped hands. “I can understand your abhorrence of Propov's methods,” he said presently. “But, in view of the unusual nature of your request, I am sure you will allow me some time to consider it, M. Parenin. I do not think that I could with conceivable justice hinder the investigation. I should be forced on my honour to give the police such assistance as I can, though manifestly I need not do so in so direct a fashion that they have only to act to complete the matter. We shall have to learn who is in charge from the Yard.”

“An Inspector Jamison,” replied our visitor at once.

“Ah, our old friend, Jamison.” Pons smiled. “I am curious to know what he makes of the problem. I fear, though, that the official police will have had ample time to muddle up the scene.”

“On the contrary,” interposed the Russian Consul. “I have used

the influence of the Consulate to have everything kept as it was found until you arrived on the scene."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "We will run over without delay."

Our drive to Number 37 Woburn Place was painstakingly slow, for the Consul's chauffeur found it necessary to drive with caution in the thick yellow fog which had settled over London. Traffic was halted for some time at Charing Cross Road junction by extremely heavy traffic pouring down Tottenham Court Road from North London. Moreover, travel along New Oxford Street and Holborn was little better. Yet, in a relatively short time, we came to a stop before a three-storey building which loomed up darkly in the fog.

Pons and I left the car without the Consul.

M. Parenin leaned from the machine. "It would not do for me to be seen here, Mr. Pons, but I shall be found at any time at the Consulate. I shall be happy to call on you if you wish and to do whatever I can to assist your inquiry."

A constable called out from the entrance to the lodging-house; at this, M. Parenin gave a curt order to his chauffeur; the car started up and was quickly swallowed by the close-pressing fog. The constable came partway down to the street, barring the way.

"No admittance," he announced flatly. But at this moment the light from his torch found Pons's face. "Oh, it's Mr. Pons. And Dr. Parker. Excuse me, sir. Just follow me, Mr. Pons. Inspector Jamison's inside."

The torch went out and the constable moved away from us to throw open the outer door. At the sound of our entrance another constable looked from a room at the far end of a long hall, his head framed in the light streaming through the open doorway. He withdrew, and gave place to Inspector Jamison, whose rotund form was readily recognizable as he stepped out into the hall to confront us.

"My word, Pons!" he exclaimed. "I never thought to encounter you at the scene of so ordinary a crime."

"However intentioned, you flatter me," said Pons with a thin smile. "Yet it hardly strikes me that the discovery of an unknown victim of murder in a room let to someone else is entirely commonplace."

Jamison shrugged and stepped aside, his chubby face with its carefully kept moustache turned now toward the contents of the room. "Take a look around, Pons. We'd like to have the body moved; the Foreign Office ordered us to disturb nothing until you had seen the place."

The first object to attract Pons's attention was, of course, the corpse of the victim, almost in the centre of the room, the body slumped upon a small table from a large armchair. The head and shoulders had fallen forward to a chessboard on the table and lay grotesquely amid a scattered group of overturned chessmen. In falling forward, the victim's arm must have swept half the table clear, for chessmen were flung over the floor to the left. The right arm supported the victim's head, and in his right hand a chessman was still tightly clenched. Quite evidently the murdered man had been struck down from behind; next to the chair on the floor lay the heavy candelabrum already designated by Scotland Yard as the instrument of death.

The victim, I saw after but a little examination, was not too well dressed; yet there were some indications that his dress was casual rather by deliberation than of necessity. He was extremely obese, and his large, flabby hands with the puffy face beneath the bushy black beard which covered the lower half of it, testified to indulgent living. He was far from an attractive man; he would easily have repelled many people in life.

Pons, however, paid scant attention to the body. He seemed more concerned with traces of the former occupant of the room than with the victim's appearance. The room itself was indeed in a state of disorder, as the accounts in the press stated; it gave every evidence of having been hastily gone through in a determined search. Drawers stood half-open, clothes lay on the floor of the open closet at the far end of the room, books and papers were tumbled indiscriminately from the shelves and stands along the walls.

"Has anything been taken from Propov's pockets?" asked Pons.

Jamison nodded and pointed silently to a chair opposite the victim. There lay two objects: an ordinary sandbag and a peculiar metal seal. Pons examined one after the other with his customary care.

"The sandbag is Propov's trademark," said Jamison. "The seal seems to be that of some secret organization."

"The Inner Circle," suggested Pons with an oblique smile.

"I wondered about that," assented Jamison, "but I'm not sure the organization's still in existence. The Yard's had no definite word of the Circle's work of late; neither has British Intelligence. We can assume that the Circle has either been suppressed or that it's gone underground."

"The design in the seal is crudely stamped in and suggests the Soviet government," said Pons, handing the seal to Jamison. "The

Inner Circle has probably been absorbed into the OGPU."

Pons now walked attentively about the room, examining drawers and books on the shelves, pausing before one shelf of books for some time. He invaded the clothes-closet and the adjoining lavatory. He returned at last and stood with Jamison gazing at the body.

"Undoubtedly the Yard has evolved a theory," said Pons.

"Nothing definite, no," answered Jamison. "It's my idea this man Propov came here to do away with Mrs. Baker's lodger, but something went wrong and the tables were turned. I don't entirely eliminate the possibility of a third person's concern, of course."

"You have a description of the man who called himself Landon Hall?"

"As far as it goes, yes. Mrs. Baker's statement isn't particularly helpful. A man of medium height, with a small pointed beard—"

"Yet someone shaved in the bathroom not less than twenty-four hours ago," interposed Pons.

"He might have shaved himself," agreed Jamison. "That would be the logical thing to do if he killed Propov and hoped to escape."

"Clean-shaven, then. A man who walked with a limp, and probably had a left leg of cork—you too certainly noticed the smooth left boots of each pair in the closet."

Jamison nodded casually.

"A man of some wealth," Pons went on, "for only a wealthy man would afford a single private printing of a Russian translation of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste*, with an inlaid original plate by Augustus John. A highly cultured man; he has books in seven different languages. And I daresay a pronounced aesthete, for he owns such books as Huysman's *A Rebours* and *La Bas*, Machen's *Hill of Dreams*, Pater's *Marius*, Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, and others expounding aesthetic doctrines. Finally, he was either of the Russian nobility or in a position to receive their books, for many of his volumes are marked with the Romanoff coat of arms."

Jamison looked at Pons a little askance.

"Of course, you noticed that the man wore his hair rather long, and that he was of middle age or past, as the long grey and black hairs on the greatcoat in the closet tell us. And you will doubtless have seen that Hall was of a highly nervous temperament, and that he wore a monocle?"

"You have the better of me, Pons," said Jamison with admirable patience. "One would think you know the man."



"I fancy I do," said Pons quietly.

Jamison looked the amazement he felt. "Oh, come now, Pons! You don't expect me to believe that?"

Pons smiled enigmatically.

"But if you do, of course, your inferences about his appearance are elementary," continued Jamison. "His nervous temperament, for instance."

"In the second drawer of that bureau beyond the table you'll find an eyeglass on a cord; the cord is badly frayed along a section covered by the movement of the clip on it," answered Pons. "I submit that nervous people who wear glasses consistently play with the clips on their cords, twirl them, and otherwise occupy their hands. But these matters are, as you say, elementary. You were beginning to tell me your concept of what took place here, assuming that Propov came here to do away with Hall."

"Yes." Jamison would have gone on, but Pons once again interrupted him.

"And then softened sufficiently to sit down for a game of chess with him?"

Jamison was momentarily disconcerted. "Perhaps. The tenant Hall may not have known Propov."

"I rather think he did. As a matter of fact, an old picture of Propov, cut from a newspaper, lies between the pages of one of the books on the top shelf of the rack across from the table. A book with a bright red binding," Pons went on, as Constable Jones went over to examine the books on the top shelf.

The picture was shortly laid down before Jamison, who examined it thoughtfully, his pale eyes narrowed.

"That's at least five years old, Pons," he said at last. "Hall might easily have forgotten him since then."

"I do not remember saying anything to the contrary," agreed Pons. "But the picture you adduce of a man bent on murder coming calmly to a chess game and himself being murdered leaves some unsatisfactory questions. I submit that murder was not Comrade Propov's primary goal. I suggest that he was in search of something."

Jamison made an all-embracing gesture toward the ransacked appearance of the room.

"Ah, but this *mêlée* was not made by someone in search of something," protested Pons. "Surely Hall would not have permitted Propov to ransack his room? And surely, had he done so, Propov

would not be sitting at chess. No, the appearance of the room derives from the haste of the murderer to take his leave with such valuables as he could not do without."

"Unless, of course, we postulate a third and thus far unknown murderer."

"Granted. You have looked up Propov?"

"Yes. He was registered at 217 St. George Street as Pyotór Harlov. The area is one frequented by Russian emigrés."

"Very probably then Hall knew Propov initially as Harlov."

"We have assumed that Hall recognized Propov only as a fellow-Russian," said Jamison. "This meeting was very likely not their first. Hall, if a Russian, was himself in hiding, and took Propov for another Russian in hiding. What happened, as I see it, was this: in the middle of a game of chess, Hall believes that his life is in danger from the man he knows as Harlov. He rises on some pretext and, passing behind Propov, seizes the candelabrum and strikes Propov down. He then shaves hurriedly, takes only the barest necessities, and escapes."

"Yet he left his wallet, well stuffed with notes, in the pocket of his greatcoat."

"He may easily have forgotten it," explained Jamison.

"Despite taking the trouble to shave in order to disguise himself? Does it not seem logical that, having gone so far, he should also supply himself with money to take him from London?"

"He may have had other resources."

"Conceivably. You postulate that Propov and Hall were acquainted as countrymen; Propov's London address would be a natural place for Hall to make Propov's acquaintance, assuming both men to be in hiding. Yet, does it not seem somewhat unusual that Hall, a highly cultured man, would frequent a place which is not particularly noted for harbouring men of culture, but rather more men of Propov's calibre?"

"Why not?" protested Jamison. "The fellow was in hiding, wasn't he? He was a Russian; it seems natural that he'd seek out other Russians even at the risk of running foul of the Yard."

Pons raised his eyebrows. "You believe he was in hiding from the police? I submit rather that he was hiding from his fellow countrymen."

"Then how explain his willingness to see Propov?" countered Jamison triumphantly.

"We have no evidence that he was willing to see Propov," retorted Pons. "Rather Harlov."

"Very well," snapped Jamison, disgruntled. "Go on."

"We might as conceivably suspect Hall and Propov of being two Soviet government agents in a quarrel which turned out disastrously for Propov. In such an event, the charge would very likely be murder in the first degree. But if your hypothesis proves correct, would the charge not then be countered by a claim of self-defence?"

Jamison pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I doubt it," he said finally. "He might plead self-defence; wouldn't that be natural? Circumstantial evidence wouldn't prove his claim. Chances are, though, he'd be packed off to Russia, unless he's taken out papers."

"And left to the mercy of the Soviet government, eh?" asked Pons.

"I suppose so."

I had had no difficulty in following this seemingly aimless conversation; clearly Pons meant to establish in his own mind the possible fate of the man Hall, if Scotland Yard found him. Pons, however, having satisfied himself on this score, was now engaged in looking at the chessmen scattered about; he appeared to be counting them, and I, too, began almost unconsciously to add them up—sixteen pawns, four rooks, four knights, four bishops, two queens—but there was only one king. Perhaps the remaining king had been kicked under one of the articles of furniture.

Even as the thought occurred to me, Pons went to the floor on his knees and began to peer rapidly under the table and around the rug at the edge of the chairs. Jamison watched in silence; his association with Pons had been of sufficient duration to teach him a certain tacit respect for my companion's methods. He contented himself only with a routine examination of a chessman, a knight he picked up from the table.

The chessmen were carved in ivory and seemed very solid. The set was doubtless valuable; I should have regretted parting with it, had I owned it, for it appeared to be hand-wrought. But the set was evidently not without blemish, for when Pons came to his feet once more, he held in his hands two queens, one of which he immediately placed upright on the table, the other of which he continued to hold; its perfect whiteness was marred by a faint dull brown line which encircled it in the middle. It had obviously at one time been broken and mended with glue.

"I take it you noticed that one of the chessmen, a king, is missing?"

"I hadn't," confessed Jamison. "I daresay they played with a substitute."

"That is always a possibility, however remote," agreed Pons. He held the queen out to Jamison, who took it. "You have no objection to my keeping this?"

"None at all, provided only you'll have to surrender it if Hall turns up and demands it."

"Quite so," said Pons, dropping the chessman into his pocket.

"I need hardly ask," asked Jamison somewhat stuffily, "whether you and I are working toward the same end. I'm satisfied that anyone with power enough to hold us up for ten hours must be someone of considerable influence; so I'm satisfied on that score."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Yet there are a few favours I'd like to ask—for your own sake as well as mine. I want you to use the Yard's influence to insert a news paragraph in all the national dailies. Let the Yard phrase it as they see fit. It should be to the effect that—" He paused abruptly, halted by the dubiety of Jamison's expression. "But, no, let me set it down."

He drew a chair up to the table, moved the chessmen to one side, and found paper in a drawer opposite Propov's body. Since he carried his pen with him, he was soon writing rapidly in a firm, legible hand, with Inspector Jamison and myself reading over his shoulders as he wrote, much to Pons's annoyance.

"The mysterious murder of an unknown person in the lodging house of Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, was taken in hand today by Inspector Seymour R. Jamison, whose capable work in the matter of the Black Narcissus crime only two weeks ago will be recalled. Inspector Jamison quickly discovered that the deceased was Pyotor Harlov, a Russian emigré, registered at 217 St. George Street, Stepney. Spurred by the nature of the facts evident to him, the Inspector has now reached the conclusion that the lodger, Landon Hall, has also met with foul play, since many of his most valuable possessions are still in his lodgings. Mr. Hall may have been abducted, and various addresses in Stepney and Wapping, known to be frequented by Russian emigrés, are under surveillance.

"The body of Harlov has been removed, and the guard has been lifted. Mrs. Baker has requested to relatives of Mr. Hall

to step forward and remove his effects, so that she may re-let the room. That the criminal or criminals will not long remain at large is assured by Inspector Jamison's previous performances."

Pons finished; he turned to hand the account to Jamison. "Read it over and send it off at once."

"Very well, Pons," said Jamison, manifestly flattered at the highly complimentary nature of what my companion had written. He did not trouble to re-read the notice, but beckoned to Constable Jones, gave him what Pons had written, and turned back to Pons. "Do you suggest we watch 217 St. George Street for the abductors?"

"By all means, Jamison," replied Pons. "And, of course, you will withdraw your men from here at once."

Jamison demurred. "Do you think that the best course?"

"In view of the fact that Parker and I will occupy this room until at least the day after tomorrow, I think it is. If any results are to be expected, the plan is best. And pray observe that such results as I may obtain are yours as well. By all means take all the time you need to remove Propov's body and the evidence collected on that chair, with the addition of the candelabrum, the *instrumentum mortis*."

It was not until after Inspector Jamison and his men had departed that Pons relaxed. He sat down in the chair which had so recently held the evidence Jamison had collected and regarded the empty chair across from him with quizzical interest. From there his gaze went to the mantel behind, and I assumed that he was picturing Hall in the act of striking down Propov.

"Yes, you are right, Parker," Pons said without turning. "I am reconstructing the crime. There are aspects of it which I find nothing short of intriguing."

"Oh, come, Pons!" I protested. "It seems as plain as a pikestaff to me."

"I don't doubt it," he replied dryly. "But think on it for a moment. We are allowed to assume that Propov, the OGPU killer, is on Hall's trail. With what end but that to which so many other White Russians have come—assassination? Yet we have all the evidence to believe that the two men, murderer and victim, were engaged in a game of chess before the crime. I submit that if Propov's motive and goal were Hall's death, no good could have come

of having a game of chess with his intended victim. The portrait of the gloating killer is, I fear, limited very largely to the penny dreadfuls. No, I fancy, M. Propov's goal was not primarily Hall's death, whatever his secondary goal may have been. This seems to have escaped the good Jamison; I am curious to know whether it escaped M. Parenin as well."

"The circumstances are somewhat peculiar," I admitted.

"It is generous of you to say so," said Pons with a whimsical smile.

"But not half so peculiar as your statement that you knew who Hall really was."

"Ah, it is not particularly difficult to establish Hall's identity. We have been given several leading facts—he is a Russian emigré, he has some royal connections, he lacks one leg or foot, he wore a black Vandyke. Think back to 1917. Picture to yourself a Russian nobleman who fits Hall's description."

The picture was immediately provocative; it called to mind an old portrait-photograph I had seen in a London exhibition. The portrait, I remembered, had been labeled with the name of a gallant Russian count, and newspapers had made especial mention of his having had a leg shot off in a Polish border skirmish in 1914.

"Why," I began, "it would suggest—but no, he is dead."

"You were thinking of?" asked Pons.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, cousin to the Czar."

"Precisely. That is our man."

"Impossible!" I cried.

"Not at all! No one has ever proved his death. Can you recall the circumstances relating to his disappearance?"

"I know of none. I am certain he has never again appeared, though many court nobles of Russia have turned up in Vienna and Paris."

"Allow me to refresh your memory. Rumour prevalent in 1918 announced his 'escape disappearance,' it was then called, a week before the Czar and his family were seized. Through Berlin, Scotland Yard received certain information with which Inspector Jamison might have done well to acquaint himself. The Count did not vanish entirely empty-handed; with him went a rather precious stone, the Orloff diamond, worth about a hundred thousand pounds."

"Ah! Propov's goal!"

"You have hit it, Parker. I congratulate you," said Pons. "I find it difficult to conceive that the Soviets would permit such a jewel to slip through their hands without at least an attempt to retrieve it. The assignment is surely a natural one for a man like Propov. Yet the Count must have known the identity of his pursuer, whose search began in 1923, for the cutting he saved so suggests; it is dated 1923, which is additionally informative. The portrait in the cutting might account for the Count's failure to recognize Propov when he first saw him, for the black beard was not characteristic of Propov, who was one of those fellows who fancy themselves to best advantage with a strong lower jaw jutting out like a challenge to their fellow men.

"Let us, then, reconstruct events as they very probably took place. We can assume that the Count met Propov, perhaps in one of those 'accidental' meetings which Propov could arrange. Propov is in no haste to liquidate the Count; he must first learn where the stone is hidden. So he cultivates the Count, and he is finally invited to the Count's lodgings, where he waits for some betrayal of the jewel's hiding-place. Unfortunately for him, the Count recognizes Propov in the man Harlov, and acts at once, as Jamison concluded, by taking the offensive—rising on some pretext, passing behind his would-be assassin, to seize the heavy bronze candelabrum with which to kill Propov. His next moves are obviously the result of panic. Was Propov alone? Is the house under observation even now? He tries to disguise an identity already marked by his missing leg; he shaves, his panic growing. Finally he takes flight, taking with him only the Orloff diamond."

"I am afraid there is a flaw in the theory, Pons," I could not help pointing out, not without triumph. "There is no logic in Parenin's protection of a former Russian nobleman, the enemy of the Soviet whose government Parenin represents."

"Ah, there is little logic in mankind," answered Pons, smiling. "M. Parenin is, I fear, at heart a Royalist. And with no love for Propov, whose innumerable atrocities serve to give any observer in possession of the facts a sense of the fitness of things at his end."

"Then if Parenin wants the Count to escape, how can you promise Jamison that your results will be his?"

"Surely they have always been, haven't they? Whether I wished it or not?"

"But you don't even know where the Count is!"

"No, nor have I any wish to. If Jamison keeps his word to insert the notice I wrote into the dailies, I expect him to call on us without delay."

"Absurd!" I cried. "He will be taken. Why should he come back?"

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Because he took the wrong chessman!"

"What do you mean?"

"Let me suggest that you compare the weight of that queen on the table with this one in my pocket."

He handed both to me.

"The difference in weight is so slight as to be almost imperceptible," continued Pons, "but it exists. The Orloff diamond lies hidden in the broken chessman you hold in your hand."

"But the Count certainly wouldn't make a mistake of that kind," I protested.

"In the circumstances, he did. Look here." He bent and picked up the king. "We assume that the Count took the other king. I submit that this fact is capable of but one interpretation — that the king was also broken. Presumably the Count had originally attempted to conceal the stone in the king, found the king too small, and settled on the queen. In his panic, it was a simple mistake to seize the king instead of the queen; they are not dissimilar in appearance or size. By now he has discovered his mistake; he is therefore certain to return for the broken queen just as soon as he considers that it is safe for him to do so. For that reason alone I persuaded Jamison to send out the notice I wrote.

"We are therefore unlikely to have a visitor before nightfall, following publication of the notice. We may as well spend the time, if you can be spared from your practise for the day, in sleep."

Shortly after eleven o'clock of the night that followed an uneventful day, I felt Pons reach out and touch me lightly on the arm.

"Don't move, Parker," he whispered, "our man is at the side window."

A slight rustling sound reached my ears. Then, in the whiteness of the fog-square of window, a figure stood for some minutes in absolute silence. Presently the window began to slide up very slowly to a quarter of its length, when there was a pause for listening. Evidently satisfied that he was unobserved, our nocturnal visitor pushed the window up as far as it could go. Again he listened for some moments; then he reached up, grasped the window-jamb, and pulled himself into the room, where he stood for a hesitant mo-

ment in the darkness, limned against the white fog outside, before he came slightly forward, walking with a pronounced, though carefully hushed, limping sound.

Without warning, Pons turned on his flash. Its bright light struck our visitor full in the face.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, I believe," said Pons. "Will you be seated?"

The Count made a tentative movement toward the window, but I was there before him, and he turned again to Pons, who had leaped to the switch and illuminated the room. The Count stood blinking at Pons in the light; I noticed how well he fitted the description Pons had postulated, and saw too, several places on his chin where he had cut himself while shaving. His hair was somewhat disheveled, and his features were unnaturally pale. His firm lips trembled as he regarded Pons.

"You are not—not police?" he asked hopefully, looking from one to the other of us.

"We are not police," Pons assured him.

The Count sank into a chair. "What do you want of me?"

"You came, I believe, for this," said Pons, extending his hand; the broken chessman lay in his palm.

The Count looked at Pons in sudden terror. "You are not from—the Government?"

"We are not, though we are acting in unofficial capacity for part of it."

"Ah! Who is it then? Is it Parenin? Yes, it is surely Parenin!" he exclaimed.

"Quite so. You know M. Parenin?"

"Yes. As a boy, he was a guard in my father's house. Yes, I know him well. He was the only one in the city who knew of my identity."

"It is unnecessary to tell you that we are in possession of most of the facts of Propov's death. But tell us, how did you encounter him? That is a matter of detail about which we can only speculate."

"In the street, sir. Oh, it was foolish, but I was lonely, very lonely. Parenin could not visit me without arousing suspicion. Propov must have known me at once; he was so unnaturally gracious. I didn't recognize him then, though I knew he had been looking for me since 1923, when I was warned against him in Paris. I cut out a newspaper picture of him then; I thought I would always remember him. But he had grown a beard in the interval; so I didn't realize who he was until we sat down to that game of chess. That was his

second visit to my lodgings. He was left-handed, and I remembered that Propov was left-handed. I studied him then, and I became convinced of his identity. Once convinced, I did not hesitate to kill him at once. I shaved then, you know, but that was indicative only of my desperation, for I could not change my leg. And then, in my haste, I picked up the wrong chessman. You know about the diamond, too?"

Pons nodded silently.

"I had tried to put it into the king, but it would not fit; so I put it into the queen. You cannot know the bitter disappointment I suffered until I read the account in the papers this morning." He looked up, eyes narrowed. "It was not true, then? I am in the hands of the police."

"On the contrary, the account was put in expressly to enable you to retrieve the jewel."

"And so that you might take me," replied the Count bitterly.

"It becomes my duty to hand you over to the police, I fear." Pons shrugged his shoulders. "But, of course, this is your property," he continued, handing the chessman to the Count. "I will exchange it for the broken king."

The Count silently handed the king to Pons, who gave it the queen's place in his pocket.

"It will take us a few moments to notify the police, Count Romanoff," said Pons. "For your convenience, I have packed your wallet, your most valuable books, and most of your clothes. You will have time, I daresay, to see whether I have forgotten anything."

The Count's eyes met Pons's briefly. He murmured his thanks for Pons's thoughtfulness in packing his things while I had slept. Then Pons beckoned to me, and together we left the room.

In the hall, Pons went directly to the telephone, where he called the number the Russian Consul had given him.

"M. Parenin?" I heard him say. "Solar Pons here. I called in regard to our problem of last evening. Our quarry is quite safely in our hands, but it might be well to prevent further official pursuit. Early tomorrow morning, please telephone Inspector Seymour Jamison of Scotland Yard and tell him I have delivered into your hands the man known as Landon Hall; assure the Inspector that Hall is already on his way to Russia in the hands of government agents. Above all, make certain that Inspector Jamison is to receive full credit for solving the crime at 37 Woburn Place."

There was a brief pause. Pons chuckled. "Official notice, eh? Inspector Jamison has a great respect for anything official."

Pons turned from the telephone. "I fancy that will satisfy both our client and the estimable Inspector. Now let us see how our prisoner fares."

He looked cautiously into the Count's quarters. There was no one there.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "how careless of us! I am afraid our prisoner has escaped."

On the way back to our own quarters, Pons said, "We must be sure to look at the morning papers, Parker. I daresay we shall find the affair chronicled under some such caption as, shall we say, *Inspector Jamison Scores Again!*"