

Upstairs in a Venice hotel room, with a palatially too-high ceiling and palatial gold wallpaper, at half past eleven in the morning, a middle-aged lady with snow-white hair lay in a palatially wide bed with black and gold carved bedposts, under an over-opulent chandelier of antique Murano glass. Above her head rose a white lace canopy, falling in rich folds and draped across the whole width of the bed. Its purpose was to keep out the mosquitoes but it now served to heighten the impression of the white-haired lady's lying in state. The door into the living-room stood open. The lady in the bed turned towards the window, looked out at the sky for a while, then called faintly,

'Judith!

A beautiful dark-haired girl came in from the living-room and bent dutifully over the bed.

'You called, Ma'am?'

'Open the window, please. I don't think I'll get up today.'

The dark-haired girl opened the window, admitting the fresh breeze and the hubbub of the Grand Canal into the most expensive room of this five-hundred-year-old *palazzo*-turned-hotel.

'Where is Irma?'

'I think she went for out for a short walk before lunch.'

'And my husband?'

'He went with her.'

'Thank you.'

The dark-haired girl went back to the living-room and went on reading her book in her chair by the window. The Lietzens' suite comprised four rooms in all. Beyond the living-room was Irma's bedroom, and opening off Mrs Lietzen's bedroom was the room where Mr Lietzen slept. Across the corridor, a little further away, was a fifth room, much plainer than the others. This belonged to the beautiful dark-haired girl, Mrs Lietzen's nurse. There was a sixth room too, but it was not in Venice. It was in Mestre, at the Hotel Zordan. That was where the chauffeur was staying, next to the garage, so as to be close to the seventh room, officially called the 'box', where the motor car was kept. The chauffeur went there every day at noon, to 'groom the horse', as he put it, to brush it, feed and water it and to check its hooves. The Lietzens lived in style. No family from their region of the Danube basin put on a better show. Lietzen had no fortune of his own; like most speculators he aimed to tie down his fickle wealth in the jewellery he gave his wife. His income was immense but he was wayward with it. As soon as he came into any money, he spent it all on his wife and daughter. Just at the moment he was rather short, although 'rather short' in Lietzen's case was still great riches by any ordinary standards. For Lietzen, having 'no money'