THE SECOND OMNIBUS OF CRIME



EDITED BY DOROTHY L SAYERS

Coward McCann

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1932

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DOROTHY L. SAYERS



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§ 2 MYSTERY AND HORROR

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, or rather more, a friend and myself, being stranded in London on a wet Sunday with nothing particular to do, went down to one of the great termini, to see if we could find a detective-story to read aloud. I remember that we started with no very high hopes. The book-stall was more likely, we thought, to be stocked with "ordinary novels." We were lucky. We found Cleveland Moffet's *Through the Wall,* and we congratulated ourselves. To-day we should be surprised if we could not choose between a score or so of detective-novels, all reasonably well written and issued by first-class firms.

Within the last decade, the detective-story has, in fact, sprung into a popularity and a respectability almost alarming to its friends. It is pleasant, of course, to feel oneself respectable and respected, but all privilege carries with it its own responsibilities. Even within the few years which separate this volume of *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* from its elder companion, an increased solemnity has come over both the writers and the critics of detective-fiction. Mystery-mongering has become self-conscious; monographs and critical studies are appearing. Here and there a really advanced and intelligent reviewer will even make a distinction between the detective-story proper and the "blood"; although his efforts are usually frustrated by the caption-artist, who contrives to lump together a mathematical problem by Freeman Wills Crofts, a curious study of murderous psychology by C. S. Forester, a spy-story by "Sapper," and a book about Chicago gun-men by Edgar Wallace, under the generic title: "Four Holiday Thrillers for Murder Fans."

Up to a point this serious approach is all to the good. The literary technique of the detective-story has improved out of all knowledge. To-day, when I hear somebody say that he never reads detective-stories "because they are so abominably written," I know that he has simply not been trying, and is probably basing a generalisation on some remark made by Mr. Gladstone in 1882. Here and there a writer, otherwise careful and conscientious, still clings to the old clichés: the clues are "examined with meticulous care," the case is still "one of the most baffling and sinister that Detective Jones had ever investigated," the criminal still "slips

through the meshes of the police-net," the discoverer of the corpse is still "stunned by the shock of this horror," and while our old friend the "blunt instrument" is now seldom mentioned except within the inverted commas of implied ridicule, our yet older friend the "sickening thud" still occasionally makes its solemn and melodramatic appearance. But actual bad grammar and bad English are becoming rare in the serious detective-story; the worst fault of style is now mere flatness and lack of distinction, while in many of the more modern tales there is a genuine attempt to create real atmosphere. Occasionally this results in over-writing or, what is still more dangerous to the detective-story, in elaborately "clever" writing, but, in spite of failures here and there, it is evident that there is a genuine eagerness to bring the detective-story into line with the traditions of the English novel and to make it increasingly a real part of literature.

A year or two ago, it was confidently predicted that the detective-story was going to slump heavily. It was pointed out that all the possible combinations and permutations would shortly be exhausted. This point of view was rather strengthened than otherwise by the appearance of a number of critical studies in which the *genre* was analytically examined. It is painfully true that, generally speaking, things are not analysed until they are dead, and the friends of the detective-story began to feel that perhaps this sudden critical awareness was merely a symptom of approaching decay.

So far, however, publishers' sales do not support this rather depressing theory. In spite of unfavorable world-conditions, they show, in this country at any rate, a solid and satisfying steadiness, and this is a healthy sign. Setting aside that hardy perennial, the book-stall shocker, which is skimmed through and left in the hotel, there is a "firm demand" for the detective-mystery of the more rational type, the figures of whose sales vary little from month to month. Authors of established reputation are able to go quietly on, perfecting themselves in the manner expected of them, without being obliged to produce at too quick a rate in order to take advantage of a fleeting fashion.

It may be said that this circumstance tends to the production of the machine-made story. That is, of course, true to a certain extent. The detective-story, however, suffers less than most from being produced in this practical and unromantic manner. It is none the better for being thrown off at a white heat. In fact, it cannot be so produced. The central idea may be the result of

inspiration, but the details must be worked out in a mood of calm and almost scholarly leisure. To get the central idea is one thing: to surround it with a suitable framework of interlocking parts is quite another. To judge by the questions asked from time to time of mystery-novelists about their methods of work, it is not always realised that idea and plot are two quite different things. Frequently a story with a brilliant central idea is ruined by failure in plot-construction, and it is here that over-production is apt to have fatal effects upon a writer's work. Perhaps a brief outline of the way in which the average detective-novel is put together may be of interest, and may help to throw a little light forward upon the future possibilities in store for the detective-story.

The central idea, as a rule, is the first thing that presents itself. It may be a new method of killing somebody; it may be an ingenious method of constructing an alibi, or outwitting the law; it may merely be the fascinating mental picture of a corpse found in an odd situation. For example, in Haydn Talbot's *It is the Law,* the central idea is that a person who has once been wrongly condemned to lifelong penal servitude for the murder of a certain man (afterwards discovered to be still alive), comes out of prison and murders the real man with perfect impunity, relying on the fact that he cannot legally suffer twice for the same offence.[1] In John Rhode's *The Davison Case,* a somewhat similar legal point is exploited: there, the murderer kills a man by method A, leaving a set of false clues to prove that he murdered him by method B. He is tried on the charge, the false clues are exploded according to plan, and he is acquitted. Subsequently the detective discovers the method by which the crime was really committed, but the murderer is safe, being able to plead *autrefois acquit.* In one of my own books, *Unnatural Death* (which I mention only on the grounds that I know better than anybody how it came to be written) the central idea was the medical fact that it would be possible to kill someone by injecting a bubble of air into an important vein, while in my first book, *Whose Body?* I rather rashly started with the entrancing situation of a naked dead body planted in an innocent person's bath. In Agatha Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* the central idea must, I think, have presented itself thus: We have had murders by this and that Unlikely Person and even by the detective himself; now how about a murder by the unlikeliest person of all—by the harmless Watson who

[1] This situation occurred in actual fact.

tells the story?[1] With Mr. Freeman Wills Crofts the central idea is usually a new and ingenious kind of alibi, as, for example, in *Sir John Magill's Last Journey,* though in, for instance, *The Box-Office Murders* the story probably started from the invention of a bright and novel system of uttering forged coins.

The "idea," whatever it is, usually presents itself in a flash of insight. It may be suggested by a conversation with a doctor or lawyer, or by the account of a curious case in the newspaper columns. For a few days the mystery-monger goes about wrapped in a happy glow of murderous enthusiasm. Then he has to sit down, with more or less reluctance, to do a good deal of solid thinking. It is imperative that he should not be forced by the exigencies of his publisher's lists to start writing at once. He has still to construct the plot.

The idea usually helps to some extent in determining the outline of the plot and the characters. If the idea involves the use of some obscure poison obtainable only by a medical man or chemist, the murderer must either be a doctor or chemist, or have access to a surgery or hospital or chemist's shop; if the body has to be discovered floating in mid-Atlantic, some kind of ship or boat, or aeroplane, must be introduced to bring it there; if some legal point about the succession of an inheritance is involved, a suitable family must be brought into being to account for the circumstances of the inheritance. This seems obvious, but it is just here that the great difficulty of being plausible makes itself felt. If the work is scamped at this point, there will be nasty gaps in the continuity of the story, which can only be filled up by wresting. something out of shape. That something, I am sorry to say, is usually the psychology of the characters. Human nature is so odd and various that it is tempting to make the characters behave in obliging accordance with the exigencies of the plot. Nevertheless, too much improbability is fatal. It irritates the reader to find himself asking: "But why did Algernon behave like a boob? Why, when he found the bloodstained dagger in his left-hand boot, did he not take it to the police, instead of burying it in the garden and catching the next train to Sheffield?" If the answer is that Algernon was afraid of being suspected, the reader mutters sourly that Algernon might have known better; if, that Algernon suspected his own best girl, the reader replies by damning this

[1] This idea, which at first shocked the critics, has since been used by Virgil Markham in *Death in the Dusk* and by Anthony Berkeley in *The Second Shot.* It nearly always comes off!

imbecile love-interest; if, on the other hand, Algernon's conduct is dictated by the silly vanity of wanting to do all the detecting himself, the reader's suffering is still more acute; every time the police detective comes along he feels he wants to take him by the arm and say, "Look here, old man—that dagger, you know—that mutt Algernon took it—it isn't fair to treat you like this." Mr. Temple-Ellis, in *The Cauldron Bubbles,* takes an even more exasperating way out of the difficulty. His hero, who, at half-a-dozen points during the story, might have cleared up the whole imbroglio, and brought the book to a premature close by informing the police and remaining quietly at home, persists in getting into every kind of unnecessary danger, merely remarking on each occasion, "I know that I ought to have done thus-and-thus, but some impulse which I cannot explain prompted me to do the exact opposite." Such behaviour is mere perversity and a determination to make the plot occur in the teeth of all commonsense.

Yet the plot must occur as planned. That is where the detective-writer has a much more difficult task with his psychology than the author of the "straight" novel. He cannot afford to follow Mr. Galsworthy's plan of letting his characters "kick free of swaddling clothes and their creators." Many a hard-working mystery-monger must have gnashed his teeth with envy on reading of Mr. Galsworthy's method of work. "I sink into my morning chair, a blotter on my knee, the last words or deed of some character in ink before my eyes, a pen in my hand, a pipe in my mouth, and nothing in my head. I sit. *I don't intend;* I don't expect, I don't even hope. . . . Suddenly, my pen jots down a movement or remark. . . . When the result is read through it surprises me by seeming to come out of what went before, and by ministering to *some sort of possible future.*"[1]

In the case of the detective-story, the future is fixed, and the characters must conform to it, with the author's deliberate intention. This does not mean that the psychology need be artificial or bad. It merely means that proper care must be taken at the beginning to choose the right plot-character combination. Wherever a detective-story fails in plausibility, it may be safely said that the failure is due to a wrong choice of plot to carry the idea or to insufficient care in so visualising and presenting the necessary characters that their actions may appear self-consistent.

[1] Romanes Lecture, 1931. (My italics.)

Usually the fundamental mistake is in the plot-construction. If the plot demands that a character should appear at one point as a careful, methodical business man and at another as a happy-go-lucky, hand-to-mouth hedonist, it is as a rule useless to attempt to reconcile the incongruities. The plot must be scrapped, If, however, it is only that the plot calls for a somewhat elaborately drawn character, full of human contradictions—such as, for example, an artistic person, intensely sensitive to natural beauty but selfish and peevish in the routine of daily life, then it is only necessary to see that this contradictoriness is plainly displayed to the reader from the start. It is useless to carry on with the mechanics of the plot in the happy hope that the characters will "all come right on the night of the performance."

Naturally, this kind of "fundamental brainwork" takes time and thought, and—what is even more important—space. But there is very much less excuse for carelessness in this respect than there was ten years ago. At that time publishers were naughty enough to insist upon a limit of 70,000 or 80,000 words for a detective novel. Naturally, within such rigid limits, it was almost impossible to do anything but set out the mechanical details of the plot and reduce the characters and their motives to an unintelligible summary. As a result, the said characters and motives were of the crudest kind: a murder was committed, let us say, out of revenge for an ancient wrong; but there was no time in which to show us that the murderer was the type of person to brood over an ancient wrong, or, indeed, to tell us much about the wrong, whatever it was. It had to be stated baldly, somewhere about the time of the discovery, that "Smith, who was a man of sullen and revengeful disposition, had never forgiven Brown for robbing him of his affianced bride, the beautiful Mary Jenkins." The proper way of showing that Smith was sullen and revengeful would be, of course, to show him exhibiting sullenness and revengefulness about some matter extraneous to the plot, but you cannot do that in 80,000 words if your plot is at all complicated. At the present time, however, publishers have come to realise that the public prefers a novel with "plenty of reading in it." They will accept, without wincing, novels of 100,000 or 120,000 words, so that the writer now really has a chance to explain his people a little, and even to indulge in a few airs and graces in the way of humour, natural description and charm of presentment.

In consequence partly of this fact and partly of a natural re-

action against the extremely mathematical form of detective-problem which held the field for so long, there has been of recent years a distinct tendency to produce a type of story with a more elaborate and realistic psychology than was once thought necessary or desirable. Murderers are on the whole less wicked than they were and victims less innocent—there is more light and shade about them both. Several attempts have been made to show the circumstances leading up to the murder, thus producing what is rather a novel with a detective interest than a detective-story pure and simple. Mr. Anthony Berkeley has issued a manifesto on the subject [1] in which he makes his own intentions clear:

> "I personally am convinced that the days of the old crime-puzzle pure and simple, relying entirely upon plot and without any added attractions of character, style or even humour, are, if not numbered, at any rate in the hands of the auditors; and that the detective-story is in process of developing into the novel with a detective or crime interest, holding its reader less by mathematical than by psychological ties. The puzzle element will no doubt remain, but it will become a puzzle of character rather than a puzzle of time, place, motive and opportunity. . . . There is a complication of emotion, drama, psychology and adventure behind the most ordinary murder in real life, the possibilities of which for fictional purposes the conventional detective-story misses completely."

If this is really to be the new line of development, it means for many writers the learning of a completely new technique, and for a year or two theory is likely to remain in advance of practice; but on the whole public opinion is, I think, on the side of the reformers. At the moment the older type still flourishes and sells well, while the new interest in criminal psychology is represented by a number of interesting books which are rather studies in murder than detective-stories, such as C. S. Forester's *Payment Deferred* and *Plain Murder* and Francis Iles's *Malice Aforethought*. But before very long, a formula for combining the two types of story will be discovered by somebody. *Malice Aforethought* is, indeed, a detective-story already to some extent, in the sense that it focuses interest and curiosity on the means by which the crime is actually discovered, as well as on the motives which led to its commission. It is, in fact, conceived on the lines laid down by R. Austin Freeman in those four pioneer stories [2]

[1] In his preface to *The Second Shot*.
[2] The first stories in *The Singing Bone*.

in which Part One tells how the crime was committed and Part Two tells how the crime was detected. In these, however, the detection is related from the point of view of the detective, whereas in *Malice Aforethought* the point of view of the murderer is retained throughout. In this respect the book more closely resembles Isabel Ostrander's *Ashes to Ashes.*

But if this is the tendency of the detective-novel, what is going to happen to the detective short story? Let me say at once that the situation here is exactly reversed and is becoming daily more and more difficult. Whereas the book-publisher is employing a more and more enlightened elasticity as regards the length and treatment of the stories which he accepts, the magazine-editor is constricting his requirements more and more till they have become an absolute bed of Procrustes. At one time, 10,000 words was the recognised length for a magazine detective-story: now, the editor frequently fixes a limit of 6,000 words or even less, while a story of 11,000 or 12,000 words is practically unsalable. Again, while the modern publisher will admit a leading lady and *jeune premier* of almost human character and appearance, or even dispense with them altogether, the magazine-editor clings passionately to what he calls the "human interest" of the fair, spotless maiden, and her bronzed and chivalrous lover. To add to the difficulty, he demands that the murder, if there has to be a murder, should have nothing morbid or unpleasant about it.

The consequence is that it is at present very difficult to persuade the best mystery-writers to bother about the short story at all. The very great labour involved in getting a bright, novel and agreeable murder, inventing a suitable detective, dragging in the human interest and then compressing the thing into 6,000 words is scarcely worth while. After an amount of brain exhaustion which would almost suffice to produce a full-length novel, the net result usually is that the writer feels himself to have merely wasted a perfectly good plot. For the central idea—which, as we have seen, is the nucleus about which every plot has to revolve—is used now and cannot as a rule be used again. The writer feels, very properly, that he has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, since the price paid, even by a high-class magazine, for a short detective-story is seldom comparable with the advance payment on a full-length novel.

The detective short story, therefore, is in the position of a city built between the sea and a precipice. On the one side it is being gradually undermined, while circumstances prevent its expansion

on the other. It cannot, like the detective-novel, grow largely and loosely towards a wider psychology and more humane style, because of editorial edicts tending to constrict it; and meanwhile, the available subject-matter is becoming seriously curtailed. A short story has all its eggs in one basket; it can turn one trick and one trick only; its detective-interest cannot involve a long investigation—it must be summed up in a single surprise. And so hard have detective-writers worked in the last half-century, that there are now remarkably few tricks the reader does not know. The substituted corpse, the gramophone alibi, the murder by means of an animal, the forged finger-print, the key turned from the other side of the door, the put-back clock, the mechanical device for turning the light on and off, the trick flask—the reader knows them all and knows how to detect them as well as the detective himself. In the novel they can still be used—or some of them. (Personally, I think the gramophone should be given a rest.) In the course of telling a long story it is possible to camouflage them by a multitude of complicating circumstances. But in the short story they have to stand unsupported, and their eyelids are a little weary. Thus the detective short story, prevented from following the natural line of development of its companion, the detective-novel, is growing rarer and rarer. One might not think so, to judge by the number of monthly magazines that devote themselves to the *genre,* but a careful examination of these publications, will prove that the majority of the tales are not true detective-stories at all, and that few of them bear the names of the younger school of detective-novelists. Of the stories in this book, those of John Rhode and Milward Kennedy represent in each case the author's sole contribution to the *genre,* while Freeman Wills Crofts and Anthony Berkeley have each produced, I believe, one other, and Henry Wade enough to fill a single volume apiece—yet these writers are among the leaders of serious detective-fiction to-day. Compare this meagre output with that of a Chesterton or a Doyle in the palmy days of the detective short story, and it is fairly evident that this type of tale is being steadily squeezed out of the market.

Perhaps it is inevitable. The magazine-editor presumably knows his business, and it is possible that the magazine-public is not the same public that clamours for real detective-stories of the soberer sort. And yet the reception accorded to the first volume of *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* suggests that there are plenty of people still in both hemispheres who do

enjoy this kind of thing. Probably the trouble is that the old formulæ are nearing exhaustion. It is not easy now to set the reader agape by swift and bewildering deduction. One remembers the passage about the boots in *Sherlock Holmes*:

> "You are in the habit of doing up your boots in a certain way. I see them on this occasion fastened with an elaborate double bow, which is not your usual method of tying them. You have, therefore, had them off. Who has tied them? A bootmaker—or the boy at the bath. It is unlikely that it is the bootmaker, since your boots are nearly new. Well, what remains? The bath. Absurd, is it not?" [1]

The conscientious modern would probably reply to himself: "It is indeed absurd. Was Watson confined to the possession of only one pair of walking boots at a time? Might he not have been buying golf-shoes, shooting-boots, skating-boots? Might he not have visited a corn-cutter's establishment?" Hampered by these considerations, the modern would hesitate, and the brilliant piece of deduction would be lost.

Sherlock Holmes put his results across largely by sheer force of his eccentric personality, and the modern liking for detectives of quiet and reasonable habits is an additional check to the manufacture of short detective-stories. Max Carrados, Monsieur Poirot and Reggie Fortune are still, Heaven be praised, carrying on the good work, and show to great advantage in the briefer form. Father Brown has, I greatly fear, retired from business—there is a backward-looking air about his last volume of reminiscences, which suggests finality. Roger Sheringham retains his breezy alertness in short-story form, and there is a quiet, persuasive charm about Henry Wade's Inspector Poole. Dr. Thorndyke has been engaged lately on lengthier investigations, but he is equally convincing, if not more so, in the short story, and we shall cherish the hope of seeing him there again. On the whole, the private detective with well-defined mannerisms comes off best in this medium. The realistic policeman is rather at a disadvantage. "He knew," remarks the creator of one of them, "that by far the greater majority of the problems that confront the police are solved, not by a single rapid process of deduction, but by a patient investigation, carried out by many people working as a team, and by painstaking putting together of the various scraps of information collected by them." [2] It is just this painstaking team-work that it is difficult to handle in a short story.

[1] *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax.*
[2] Miles Burton: *The Three Crimes.*

It will be seen that the problem of the detective short story is largely mechanical and economic, further complicated by the fact that the general trend of detective-fiction is in a direction which it is difficult for the short story to follow. Perhaps the writer who works most easily under new conditions is H. C. Bailey. His atmosphere of suspense and curiosity is attained with the modern lightness of touch and his detective achieves individuality without anything of the old pomposity. There is, too, a proper psychological complexity about many of his crimes which lifts the problem out of the realm of the commonplace. In the various adventures of Mr. Harley Quinn, Agatha Christie has made an attempt (not, I venture to think, very successfully) to combine detection with sentiment. The attempt, inasmuch as it is a novelty, is praiseworthy, but the sentiment strikes an oddly old-fashioned note, slightly suggestive of the *Passing of the Third-Floor Back*. In *Partners in Crime,* the same author has pleasantly burlesqued the detective-story, with results that are uniformly delightful if one refuses to be put off by the perpetual brightness of Tommy and Tuppence. Experiments like these are all to the good. The "avenues," as the diplomats say, are being "explored," and it is evident that the detective short story, though hampered, like other enterprises, by "world-conditions," is not going to go under without an energetic struggle.

A word may perhaps be added about the various volumes of short detective-problems which are being presented boldly and frankly in the form of puzzles, as, for example, in *The Week-End Crime Book* by J. M. Walsh and Audry Baldwin. These are skeleton detective-problems, in which the crime and all the necessary clues are rapidly summarised, and readers are invited to guess the solution, by way of a parlour game. A series of this kind was presented in a London daily newspaper a little time ago; the problem being presented in one issue and the solution in a subsequent issue. These problems, having no pretentions to literary quality, have not been included in the present volume, but the fact that they are published and, presumably, welcomed is proof of the present-day reader's eagerness to do his own detecting and be allowed to use his own wits, rather than be bludgeoned into admiration by feats of detective legerdemain. As Mr. H. Douglas Thompson puts it: "From the author's point of view the easiest procedure is to give the reader evidence, evidence, and again evidence: for it is easier to deceive where there is a surfeit of it than when there is a scarcity. This also happens

to fit in with the reader's way of thinking. But if the detective should calmly pocket a bullet that he found on the carpet without saying a word to a soul, and then calmly proceed to reconstruct the crime from this valuable clue, the irate reader feels bound to claim a penalty. For had he been there he might have found the clue himself. . . . Vital evidence should be placed in the shop-window." [1]

These considerations bring us finally to the important part played by the reader himself. His co-operation is all-important. He must—and, to do him justice, he nearly always does—come to his reading with an alert and amiable mind. The reader we mystery-mongers really like to lead for our little walk up the garden comes out like an intelligent terrier, ears cocked and tail wagging, ready to run after what is thrown to him and to root cheerfully among the shrubbery till he finds it. A spirit of mischief in his eyes assures us that he will not take us too seriously. We show him the ball and feint to throw it towards the old summer-house. He darts off in that direction—then stops, puzzled and amused. No; we are fooling him again. That stuff about the old summer-house is only poppy-cock. He was nearly taken in that time, but he has seen through us and awaits the next throw without bearing malice for the deception. At last he is off! That was a real ball—it has disappeared behind the water-tank. He grubs away energetically. There is some difficulty. He looks round deprecatingly. He feels sure the ball is there, but he cannot get it out for himself. It has gone to earth behind a large, immovable stone. (How could Jones possibly have committed the murder, when he has that impregnable alibi?) We walk up—we lift the stone—yes, indeed the stone only appeared to be the immovable fortress that it seemed. If he had only just known how, he could have shifted it for himself. Well, never mind. Next time he will remember that stones can be grubbed up. Meanwhile, it was a good game and the run was exhilarating. Thank you kindly! and what comes next?

If the reader does not like being led up the garden, if he does not want to hunt for balls, the detective-story is no use to him. Every writer in this kind dreads the reviewer who starts off by saying that he does not care for detective-stories, but that, for once, he has made the attempt, just to see what it is his friends

[1] *Masters of Mystery*, p. 54. This is the most elaborate study of the detective-story which has yet appeared and, in spite of its rather unscholarly title, constitutes a valuable work of reference for the student.

enjoy so much. His criticism follows—embarrassed by the fact that he does not really understand the rules of the game—and usually amounts to a re-statement in other words of the fact that he does not like detective-stories. Anthony Trollope said of Wilkie Collins's books that the machinery creaked—one was always being called on to remember the precise moment at which somebody went out to post a letter. The true detective-fan has a passion for machinery. He asks nothing better than to remember dates and times and places. If the unhappy writer makes a slip on any point of detail, he writes him a stern letter, pointing out the slip and saying that this careless error has completely spoilt the story for him. He is the sternest, but also the most loyal and helpful of critics, and a wise writer will not trifle with him.

In this book, the reader will find examples of the short detective-story, old and new, for his intelligent appreciation. No attempt has been made on this occasion to classify, but the date of first publication has been in most cases appended as a rough guide for those who wish to trace the development of the *genre*. In some cases the choice of story is that of the editor; in others the writer has been invited to select the story by which he would like to be represented. It is hoped that at any rate the collection will afford amusement and entertainment to those who enjoy this kind of yarn.

With regard to the stories in the second part of the book, the editor does not claim to write as a specialist in the macabre. The supernatural is a subject with its own technique, and those who have a first-hand acquaintance with the world of spooks have a somewhat different taste in such matters from those who are merely out to enjoy an agreeable shudder. I have extended the scope of this section to include a few tales that are merely odd and quaint, such as Hugh Walpole's *The Enemy,* or which are humorous in treatment, like Captain Marryat's *Story of the Greek Slave,* or "leg-pulls" like Mrs. E. Bland's *No. 17,* or studies in suspense like Clemence Dane's *The King Waits.* I have again included a few examples of the older type of ghost-story, though not a great number, since in nothing, I suppose, has the fashion changed more completely within the last century than in the style and handling of the tale of terror. Most people will agree, I think, that it has changed for the better.

Except when—and sometimes even when—handled by a rare genius like Le Fanu, the old-fashioned ghost-story is robbed of its effect in modern ears by a kind of platitudinous emphasis

on the horrible. It makes no use of the disagreeable hint; it leaves too little to the imagination. Take an example at random—by no means one of the worst: a little tale from Bentley's *Miscellany,* published in 1839.[1] A benighted and slightly inebriated traveller comes to a lonely cottage, in which he finds a corpse in a coffin; continuing his journey, he finds that he is pursued.

> "What horror! he saw the Dead Man's coffin rattling in his rear, apparently mounted on wheels and urged on by some demon of hell. A cold and deathlike sweat broke out on his body and limbs—his hat was wet with the moisture of his brow, yet his temples burned like fire: in vain he tried to quicken his pace; his blood curdled, and he heard the fiend laughing at his misery. . . .
>
> "Next morning he was found by some labourers and carried to his home; but his reason was gone, and in his ravings he disclosed this awful story. He grew worse and worse, and within a week was *in his coffin.* Many thought the drink and excitement had made him fancy the vision: but many believed in the DEAD MAN'S RACE."

First of all, and before the actual introduction of the "vision," an ejaculation calls upon us to be horrified. This is putting the cart before the horse. Then the object of the horror is introduced, "he saw the coffin rattling in his rear"—but before we have time to be horrified, we are drawn off into an explanation of the mechanics of its progress. The writer is worried; he anticipates objections; how did the coffin get along? how could it "rattle" all by itself? Wheels must be provided (though what kind of wheels the writer does not say, and we are left wondering whether they belonged to a phantom gig or a phantom hearse, or were merely attached to the coffin after the manner of the slum-child's sugar-box). Then the writer seems to feel that the mounted coffin is not horrid enough by itself, and adds that it was "urged on by some demon of hell"—thereby, oddly enough, reducing it at once to the realm of the commonplace. Since the "demon" is not described, we see him at once as "auld Clootie," complete with horn and hoof—matter for laughter, not for fear. Then comes the description of the traveller's anguish; it is meant to be paradoxical, but is not. "Of course," we say, "if the man's head was hot, we should expect him to perspire—why not?" If the writer had cast off his delicacy and said plainly that, in spite of being in a cold sweat, the man was burning with fever, we should at least

[1] *The Dead Man's Race,* by W. Jerdan.

have realised his bodily condition more accurately. Then (after a little further description) comes the flat statement that the man's reason was gone, and immediately we find the writer worrying again about mechanical details. If so, how did anybody know what had happened to him? Of course! his ravings disclosed the awful story. Very well; he must now die, for further increase of the horror, and be put in his coffin. But perhaps the reader will be too stupid to grasp the neatness and beauty of that. He saw a man in a coffin, and within a week he was in his own coffin. Let us put it in italics, to make sure that the point is not missed. *In his coffin.* And now, since it is hardly rational really to believe in the supernatural in these enlightened days, we will offer a natural explanation: the man may have been drunk and imagined it all; but, since the reader has by now probably forgotten the title of the story, we will repeat it and put it in capitals so that there can be no doubt about it: "Many believed in the DEAD MAN'S RACE."

So there it is; tidily rounded off and perfectly unconvincing.

Now, with that tale in your mind, turn to John Metcalfe's story of *The Double Admiral* in this volume, and try to tidy it up and tuck in the ends if you can. Observe the deliberate delicacy with which the sinister island is introduced; the general dimness and queerness of the atmosphere; the complete absence of all the conventional apparatus of "ghaisties and ghoulies"; and ask yourself, at the end, what exactly did happen to the Admiral and at what precise point. The story has a trick in it somewhere; you follow it quite firmly and steadily until, somewhere in the green depths of spiritual mirror, the path "gives itself a little shake" and, like Alice, you find yourself walking in at the front door again. There is something indefinably but quite definitely wrong here—something that takes you on the blind side. If the thing could have a natural explanation, it would be as twisted and lop-sided as the supernatural explanation. But there is no explanation and no attempt to explain.

With the loss of the Dantesque heaven and hell and the discoveries of the human subconscious and the Time-space Continuum, the region of the unknown has become much vaster and vaguer than it used to be. And also I think it is true that our minds (or possibly our nerves) have become more sensitive. We are afraid where no fear is. Rattling chains and purgatorial groanings are not needed to stampede us into terror. Our surface senses have hardened; what frightens us is the touch on the sleeve, the

small voice in our ears: "Are you quite sane? are you sure you are quite sane? is life quite sane? are you sure—are you sure?" And you read Walter De La Mare's *The Tree*—and you are not quite sure.

It is not nice to feel insecure.

Most primitive, they tell us, of all our fears is the fear of falling.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS.

EDITOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The majority of the stories in this book are copyright, and may not be reprinted without the permission of the authors and publishers concerned. While the greatest diligence has been used to ascertain the owners of the rights and to secure the necessary permission to include the stories in the present collection, the editor and publisher desire to offer their apologies in any possible case of accidental infringements.

In addition to the publishers mentioned in the body of the book, my thanks and acknowledgments are due all the authors and their respective agents.

May I take this opportunity to correct a mistake in the First Volume of this collection? Misled by an inaccurate footnote in my edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens,* I attributed to Charles Collins a share in the authorship of *The Trial for Murder.* This story was, in fact, written by Dickens alone.

D. L. S.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The Publishers would like to say that Miss Sayers was most unwilling to include in this collection a specimen of her own work, but they insisted that she should.

COWARD-MCCANN, INC.

THE SECOND OMNIBUS OF CRIME

SECTION I

STORIES OF DETECTION AND MYSTERY

F. Britten Austin

THE FOURTH DEGREE

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Sebright of Scotland Yard sat in our office. He had dropped in, as he often did, unofficially, for a friendly yarn.

"Unpleasant business round at the Foreign Office this morning, Q. Q.," he remarked, as he helped himself to one of the excellent cigarettes which the Chief, though a rigid nonsmoker himself, kept hospitably for his visitors. "I suppose you've heard?"

Q. Q. raised his eyebrows.

"No," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Arbuthnot shot himself."

"Arbuthnot! Shot himself?" The Chief's voice was at once startled and incredulous.

"Yep." Sebright nodded casually, and then savored again the aroma of the cigarette between his fingers. "First-rate brand, these of yours, Quayne. Where do you get 'em?"

Mr. Quayne ignored this cold-bloodedly irrelevant question. He leaned forward across his desk, in a curious sudden alertness of expression that in any other man I should have called excitement. But Q. Q. was never excited. Merely that ice-cold brain of his, at the appropriate stimulus, could function with lightning rapidity, leap from analysis to synthesis, from clue to hypothesis, from a seeming normality to the perception of a hidden crime, with a swift accuracy that left me, despite his painstaking training, always bewildered. In this case, he had some reason for interest beyond the ordinary. Old Mr. Arbuthnot of the Foreign Office had sat in this room only yesterday.

"My dear Sebright," he said, in a tone that made that gentleman look up, "are you quite sure?"

Sebright nodded again, this time more emphatically.

"Sure," he replied, still professionally nonchalant. "Saw him myself."

"I mean—are you sure he shot himself?"

Sebright stared at him.

"No doubt about it. One of his clerks was passing along the corridor—heard a detonation in his room—opened the door and rushed in—and there was Arbuthnot collapsed in his chair at his desk—bullet-wound through the side of his head—his own revolver lying on the floor, just as it had fallen from his hand. The

clerk gave the alarm at once, of course. I was sent for—found nothing had been touched—clear case of suicide. The coroner's inquest may throw some light on the motive—no one at the F. O. could suggest any." He gave these details with a curt definiteness, finally disposing of a question that held no further interest for him.

The Chief pondered a moment.

"On which side of the head was the death-wound, Sebright?"

"The right-hand side, of course."

"You're certain of that?"

"Quite. You know his room—when you come in from the corridor, his desk is just to the left of you, and he sits with his back to the door, facing the window. The wound was on the side of the head visible as you come in—I remember seeing it at once, and accidently kicking with my foot the revolver lying on the floor. It was the normal right-hand side, right enough."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "But not normal for Arbuthnot. He happened to be left-handed. It didn't occur to you to make inquiries on that point, I suppose?"

"Of course it didn't. People aren't usually left-handed." Sebright stared, startled, at Mr. Quayne as he made the admission. "Why, you are not suggesting—"

"Murder." Q. Q. uttered the word with a grimly succinct finality.

"But why—" Sebright still stared at him out of a sudden chaos of previously settled convictions. "What makes you jump to this conclusion? Who would want to murder poor old Arbuthnot?"

"My dear Sebright,"—Q. Q.'s tight lips twisted in a faint smile, —"only yesterday Arbuthnot sat in that chair. He had come to see me—privately, unofficially—and he was very much troubled. He was convinced that there was a leakage of secret information from his department. Arbuthnot was a queer old fellow, as you know. His one hobby, I believe, was the solution of acrostics and ciphers. He used to read solemnly through the agony-column of the *Times* every evening, while his wife sat sewing opposite him, and puzzle out the code-messages of all the illicit lovers who communicate through that medium. The evening before he came to me, he had had a shock. One of the messages he decoded conveyed to some one unknown a piece of highly secret information that could only have emanated from his department. The poor old boy was in a terrible state—he did not want to go to his chief with the news until he could at the same time indicate the culprit—he was

of course, like most civil servants in a senior position, extremely sensitive to the honor of his department; it was heartbreaking to him to think it should be indiscriminately disgraced. He came to me for advice. He was to have called again today."

"Phew!" exclaimed Sebright, thoroughly perturbed. "This makes everything look different. I wish to heaven he had come to see me about it at once! I hate these stories at secondhand—I'd give a lot to hear him tell me all about it himself!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly, rose from his chair.

"He shall tell you, my dear Sebright. You shall hear, in his own voice, everything he told me—and we'll see what you make of it." He went across to a cabinet on the farther wall, opened a drawer, returned with a long black cylinder. "When a case is brought to me, I not infrequently allow my informant, unknown to himself, to tell it to the dictaphone at the same time. I have found, more than once, a help to elucidation in listening to it repeated, precisely as it was originally told, when I am sitting here undistracted by his personal presence. One can have the vital points reiterated over and over again *ad libitum*."

He sat down to his comfortably large desk, slipped the cylinder into a concealed slot, pressed a button which uncovered a long aperture in the side of the desk toward the room, pressed another button. There was a faint whir of a mechanism started into activity, and then:

"One of my clerks must somehow have taken an impression of my key—"

It was the voice—almost startlingly recognizable to me as I sat quietly at my own desk at the other side of the room—of Mr. Arbuthnot. It evoked immediately for me the image of that large-built man with a little pointed gray beard who had, only yesterday, sat in the chair where Sebright was now sitting. Sebright jumped, involuntarily.

"My God, Q. Q." he said, "it's uncanny to hear him like that! Just as if he were still here!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly as he bent down to the cylinder.

"The needle wasn't quite at the commencement," he said. "We'll let him tell his story again from the beginning." He made the necessary adjustment.

It was indeed uncanny—even to me, accustomed to hear such repetitions from the dictaphone (Q. Q. did not use the usual earpieces; he had installed a loud-speaker to which he could listen while he paced up and down the room)—to listen to that dead

man's voice repeated with lifelike accuracy in that still room. It was a deep, solemn, booming voice, a voice that would have made a bishop of its owner had he been a parson, a voice that came vibrant with natural authority. And that voice told the story all over again, precisely as I had heard it the day before from the man's living presence, just as Q. Q. had summarized it to Sebright. The record concluded on the energetically uttered phrase: *"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"*

"Well, Sebright," remarked Q. Q., as he stopped the mechanism, "what do you make of it? You have heard Arbuthnot's own voice."

"I don't want to hear it again," said Sebright with a shudder. "Shut the thing off. It gives me the creeps. Remember, I saw that man lying dead this morning."

"Practice that imagination of yours, Sebright," commented the Chief with his grim smile. "It's essential in this detective business. . . . Well, what are you going to do on this information? Anything?"

Sebright was thoughtful for a moment, evidently reluctant to open up again a matter on which he had publicly pronounced his official dictum.

"Of course," he said, "Arbuthnot might still have committed suicide—in the distress, the sense of disgrace to his department, caused by his discovery."

"Do left-handed men usually shoot themselves on the right-hand side of the head, Sebright?" asked Q. Q. quietly. "I knew Arbuthnot very well indeed. I am prepared to ask that question at the coroner's inquest."

"That means a public scandal, Quayne—a lot of unwelcome limelight on the F. O."

"I dislike private scandals even more," said the Chief. "I regarded Arbuthnot as an old personal friend—and his murderer is certainly going to be found. Remand that inquest, Sebright—and if we present the murderer simultaneously with the coroner's verdict, there will be no scandal. There will be only praise for Scotland Yard."

"But how are we going to find him?" challenged Sebright, in exasperation. "There's not the slightest clue. The revolver is admittedly Arbuthnot's own—one he kept in his desk. The clerk who burst into the room immediately after the detonation found no one but the dead man."

"Who was that clerk?"

"Oglethorpe—the next senior to Arbuthnot. He was passing along the corridor—or so he says." Sebright stopped. "Of course, he might have—"

"What?"

Sebright was suddenly illumined with a theory. "Shot Arbuthnot with Arbuthnot's own revolver and dashed out into the corridor. There's no evidence, one way or the other. The corridor was empty. People in the vicinity heard the detonation, but before they could investigate it, Oglethorpe ran into the room where the other clerks were sitting and told his story."

"H'm!" Q. Q. stroked his jutting chin. "I know Oglethorpe. . . . How many clerks are there in Arbuthnot's personal department?"

"Six—including Oglethorpe."

"Do you happen to know if the other five were in the room when Oglethorpe entered it?"

"No. There were only three—it came out while I was questioning as to who had seen Arbuthnot that morning."

"Who were absent?"

"Johnson—he was away looking for a file in the Registry."

Q. Q. nodded.

"And the other man?"

"D'Arcy Vaughan—the next in seniority to Oglethorpe. He was out at lunch."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite. He went to lunch at twelve o'clock as usual. The tragedy occurred at ten minutes past. I saw him when he returned —gave him the first news of it. . . . No, Q. Q.!" Sebright thumped his fist on his knee in emphasis. "If Arbuthnot was murdered—it could only have been done by Oglethorpe!"

"Why?" Q. Q. lifted his gray eyebrows.

"On his own showing, he dashed into that room immediately *after* the detonation. If the murderer were some one else, he must still have been there! He could not possibly have got away."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "I know Arbuthnot's room pretty well. I seem to remember that it has a large cupboard where Arbuthnot used to hang his overcoat. Allow yourself to consider another hypothesis. The murderer, hearing Oglethorpe come to the door, might have slipped into that cupboard and dodged out again immediately Oglethorpe had gone to give the alarm."

"Might!" echoed Sebright contemptuously. "All sorts of things *might* happen. I consider possibilities only after I've dealt with

certainties. What is certain is that one of Arbuthnot's confidential clerks was passing out information, that Arbuthnot knew of it and was trying to discover the source of leakage,—*did* discover it, perhaps,—that Oglethorpe had, next to Arbuthnot himself, the easiest access to secret information, that if Arbuthnot was left-handed he did not shoot himself, and that Oglethorpe was admittedly there in the room so soon after the murder that no murderer could have escaped from it—unless it was Oglethorpe himself, with his plausible story of hearing the shot while passing the door and then discovering the suicide." Sebright rose briskly to his feet. "I'm going to check up Mr. Oglethorpe a little, Q. Q.," he concluded. "And unless my intuition is much at fault, Mr. Oglethorpe is going to sleep in a police-cell tonight."

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"That intuition of yours is positively uncanny, Sebright," he said. "You may be quite right, of course. It may just as well be Oglethorpe as another. That it was one of Arbuthnot's own clerks who murdered him, I feel certain. . . . Do you mind my doing a little investigation of my own? It won't conflict with yours, and I have a personal interest in the matter."

"You can do what you like—so long as you don't scare away the game," replied Sebright magnanimously. He glanced at his watch. "I'm going to get busy—and I'll let you know directly I slip my handcuffs on the man."

Q. Q. smiled again.

"I'll do the same by you, Sebright," he said. "Well, the best of luck to you!"

The moment the door had closed behind Sebright's back, the Chief took up the telephone and asked for a number.

"Hello! . . . Yes. . . . Put me through to Mr. Oglethorpe, please. . . . Is that Mr. Oglethorpe speaking? . . . Good. This is Quentin Quayne—of the Q. Q. Agency. Could you manage to snatch a few minutes, Mr. Oglethorpe, and come round and see me here—Piccadilly Circus—as soon as possible? I should be immensely obliged to you. . . . Yes, it *is* urgent—very urgent, in fact. . . . Thank you—that's excellent."

The Chief put down the telephone, looked across to me.

"Coming at once. Oglethorpe knows me well enough to know that when I say 'urgent,' it means urgent. Now I hope we shall learn something."

Perhaps ten quiet minutes elapsed—ten minutes in which Q. Q.

after leaning back thoughtfully in his chair for a moment or two, bent forward to his desk and wrote rapidly a long single column of words on a sheet of paper—and then Mr. Oglethorpe was announced.

He came into the room, a thin, worried-looking man of about forty-five years of age, clean-shaven, a little bald, conventionally the higher grade civil servant in his morning-coat, dark trousers, and the silk hat courteously doffed as he entered, conventionally the civil servant, too, in his precise, somewhat pedantic manner. The Chief shook hands with him like an old acquaintance, indicated the chair close to his desk. Mr. Oglethorpe seated himself.

"You want to see me about this terrible business in the office, I suppose, Mr. Quayne?" he said.

"Exactly," Q. Q. smiled at him.

"I have worked with Arbuthnot for twenty years—and I should never have dreamed that he was the man to commit suicide!" exclaimed Mr. Oglethorpe, in a tone of genuine horror at the memory.

Q. Q. continued to smile as he looked straight at his visitor, but there was no humor in that smile.

"Perhaps he did not commit suicide, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said quietly.

Mr. Oglethorpe jumped in his chair.

"What? Did not commit suicide? What on earth do you mean, Mr. Quayne? It must have been suicide—why, I was in the room a fraction of a minute after his revolver went off—I heard it as I passed along the corridor. It couldn't—how could it?—have been anything else than suicide, incredible though it seems!" Mr. Oglethorpe was a picture of puzzled bewilderment—the implication in Q. Q.'s words was plain enough.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe," the Chief said in his smoothest tones, "there *is* a little doubt about it—for reasons which I will not go into. Will you just tell me all you know of the tragedy?"

Mr. Oglethorpe told his story, quite clearly and definitely, just as we had heard it already from Sebright. He was coming along the corridor from another department at ten past twelve when he heard the shot. He had rushed into the room. Arbuthnot was there alone, crumpled in his chair, a wound in the right side of his head. Horrified, he had dashed off to give the alarm. Yes—of course, he knew the cupboard in Arbuthnot's room—he could not

say whether the door of it was open or shut—he hadn't given a thought to it. He had seen no one in the corridor, before or after the tragedy.

Q. Q. nodded gravely as he finished.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe, there is a possibility—I don't want to enlarge upon it—that Arbuthnot was murdered by one of the clerks in his own department."

"Impossible!" Mr. Oglethorpe was emphatic, all his instincts outraged. "It is a monstrously absurd suggestion, Mr. Quayne, one that—as the temporary acting head of the department and in view of the plain facts—I cannot but resent!"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Oglethorpe, it is a suggestion that has been made—and one that I am bound to probe. You would of course do all you could to assist in finding poor Arbuthnot's murderer—assuming that he *was* murdered?"

"Of course I should—though, I repeat, I can't for a moment believe it. What do you require of me?"

"I want to submit the six confidential clerks in your department to a little psychological test. It is one which—if I can trust the experience of the Viennese police, and sundry little efforts of my own—can scarcely fail in such circumstances. You have heard of the word-association method?"

"Something to do with psycho-analysis, isn't it? Sheer quackery, all of it, in my opinion." Mr. Oglethorpe let it be seen that he was old-fashioned and proud of it.

"Precisely," Q. Q. concurred, with a smile. "It is a method much used by psycho-analysts. I put a word to you. You answer as quickly as possible with the first word that rises in your mind in association. I measure the time-interval, in each case, between my question and your answer. In my list of words are one or two which have a direct bearing upon the case. When those words are put to the concealed criminal, he instantly recognizes their danger and instinctively—no matter what his command of himself—hesitates for a safe word to give in answer. It is quite automatic on his part. And accordingly, to those key-words his time-interval of association will show as appreciably longer than his average. . . . Now, I want you to have the goodness to send your clerks across to me, one by one, this afternoon, Mr. Oglethorpe—and since I want to get as wide a basis as possible for my averages, I should be very glad if you would commence with yourself now."

"I haven't the slightest faith in any of this psycho-analytic charlatanry," said Mr. Oglethorpe, with a superior note of conde-

scending disdain in his voice, "but if you think it will help you, go ahead by all means. Fire away—I'm ready."

Q. Q. drew his sheet of paper in front of him, sat with pencil-point poised.

"Bread!" he said, and his pencil-point began to dot across the paper.

"Butter!" answered Mr. Oglethorpe promptly. Q. Q. stopped dotting at his first syllable, scribbled the word rapidly.

"Sea!"—dot-dot.

"Ship!"

"Horse!"—dot-dot.

"Cart!"

"House!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Room!"

"Desk!"—dot-dot-dot-dot.

"Chair!"

"Table!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Cloth!"

"Cupboard!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Bone!" Mr. Oglethorpe gave the answer, an obvious nursery-rhyme memory, almost desperately. The strain of keeping his brain alert he evidently found more difficult than he had anticipated. Q. Q. scribbled down each answer as was given.

"Carpet!"—dot-dot.

"Floor!"

And so on through a list of about fifty words where, at intervals, I remarked only *code, revolver* and *murder* as specially significant.

When he had got to the end, Q. Q. looked up with his quiet smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said. It was impossible to deduce whether or not he had detected any grounds for suspicion in that rapid quasi-schoolchild examination. "I am much obliged by your complaisance. And now will you carry it to the length of sending along your clerks, one by one, in order, let us say, of their seniority?"

Mr. Oglethorpe rose from his chair.

"Very well, Mr. Quayne. However unfounded I may and do consider your suspicions to be, it is my duty to help you probe them. But I'm quite sure you'll find in the end that poor Arbuth-not committed suicide."

"Perhaps, Mr. Oglethorpe." Q. Q. smiled at him. "But I

should all the same like to try my little test on your other clerks."

Mr. Oglethorpe departed. Q. Q. did not address a word to me in the interval while we waited for the appearance of the next clerk from Arbuthnot's office. I busied myself on the routine task before me. Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, finger-tips together, frowning in a concentration of thought beyond my guesses.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was announced. He was a younger man than Mr. Oglethorpe, struck a more modern note of smartly tailored, keen-edged efficiency. The little dark mustache on his good-looking face was neatly trimmed; his monocle gave him a touch of aristocratic differentiation from the usual office-worn type; his manner had the self-confident ease produced by the best of public-schools and a university. He smiled affably—with, however, a Foreign Office consciousness of personal dignity—as he approached the Chief.

"Oglethorpe tells me you want to see me about poor Arbuthnot's death, Mr. Quayne." He sank easily and comfortably into the chair Q. Q. indicated to him. "Anything I can do, of course ——" He made a gesture of perfect readiness to oblige. "But I'm afraid that's not much."

Q. Q.'s quiet eyes were summing him up.

"So I understand. You were at lunch, I believe, when the tragedy occurred?"

"Yes. I knew nothing about it until I returned and the Scotland Yard fellow told me. It was a shock to me, of course, as it was to everyone else. Poor old fellow! One would never have suspected a suicidal streak in him—some private worry, perhaps."

Q. Q. caressed his chin.

"Did Mr. Oglethorpe tell you precisely why I wanted to see you, Mr. Vaughan?"

"No. He merely said that you wished to talk to me on the matter."

Q. Q. nodded.

"Then I will tell you, Mr. Vaughan—and perhaps it would be as well if you regarded it as in confidence. There is reason to suspect that Mr. Arbuthnot did not commit suicide—but that he was shot by one of the clerks in his personal department—a clerk who had an urgent motive to suppress him promptly."

His eyes were fixed on Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan as he spoke, but Mr. Vaughan manifested only the startled vivification of interest normal in such circumstances.

"You mean—*murdered?*" he gasped.

"I mean murdered." The Chief was impressively specific.

"But—my dear sir!" Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was obviously much perturbed. "It seems to me fantastic—Oglethorpe almost saw him shoot himself—he was in the room a moment later—before any murderer could have escaped!" He paused for a look of utter incredulity at Q. Q. "What grounds have you for such a wildly improbable theory? Who could possibly have shot Arbuthnot? Unless Oglethorpe did it himself—which is grotesquely absurd!"

"That is what we are going to try and find out, Mr. Vaughan," replied the Chief quietly. "I'm sure I can call upon you to give me any assistance in your power?"

"Certainly—certainly," said Mr. Vaughan, "of course! But what do you want me to do?"

"I'll explain." And Q. Q. explained to him, precisely as he had explained to Mr. Oglethorpe, the psychological test he proposed to apply to the six clerks. Mr. Vaughan accepted it unhesitatingly. "Of course, there must be no exceptions," he said.

Once more Q. Q. pronounced his list of words, dotted down the time-interval before the associated word came in answer. Mr. Vaughan replied to all with—so far as I could tell—an equally prompt rapidity. He was plainly a quick-brained, highly intelligent fellow.

"Thank you, Mr. Vaughan," said Q. Q. when he had finished—and again it was impossible for me to guess, through his quiet normality of tone and feature, whether or not he had discovered the clue he sought for. "And now perhaps you will be good enough to send across the others in order of their seniority. It is unnecessary," he added with a smile, "to tell them of the purpose for which I require them."

Three more clerks followed in due course and succession—Mr. Wainwright, Mr. Turner and Mr. Billmore. All three of them were most improbable murderers, for all three—Q. Q. checked their answers one against the other—had been in their office all the morning, had not left it on any pretext until Mr. Oglethorpe had rushed in with the news of Arbuthnot's suicide. Nevertheless all three of them submitted to the test—and Q. Q. remained quietly smiling and inscrutable as they were successively dismissed.

The next—and last—to present himself was the junior, Mr. Johnson, a tall, nervous but pleasant-looking lad, scarcely in his twenties.

"Sit down, Mr. Johnson," said Q. Q., smiling at him and indicating the chair in which Johnson's predecessors had sat. "You were in the Registry at the time the tragedy occurred this morning?"

"Yes sir." The boy submitted easily to the quiet authority which emanated from Q. Q.'s personality. "I was searching for a file that had been mislaid."

"Between what times—precisely?"

"It was a little before ten to twelve when I left my room, sir. I returned at twenty minutes past." The lad was obviously nervous. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue before he spoke.

"So from ten to twelve to nearly twenty past you were in the Registry?"

"Yes sir."

Q. Q. looked at him penetratingly from under his heavy gray eyebrows.

"Very well. It is necessary for me to check all the statements I receive. I will just ring up the Registry and get them to confirm those times." He reached for the telephone.

"Don't do that, sir!" The lad had half-sprung from his chair.

"Why?"

"I did not tell you the truth, sir." I saw perspiration on the boy's brow; once more his tongue moistened his lips. He turned away his eyes from Q. Q.'s piercing scrutiny.

"Then please tell me the truth now!"

"Yes sir. I—I did not go straight to the Registry. I slipped out of the building."

"Out of the building? Why?"

"To send a telegram—at the post office across the road in Parliament Street."

"To whom did you send that telegram?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

Q. Q. frowned. I felt suddenly sorry for that lad, horrifyingly suspicious though were the circumstances that so suddenly gathered about him.

"Johnson!" The Chief's voice was sharply stern—a voice it was impossible not to obey. "You will tell me at once to whom you sent that telegram!"

The lad hesitated miserably. I saw his hands clench and unclench themselves, his face go white.

"It was to a money-lender, sir," he burst out after a moment when his voice seemed to have refused to function.

"A money-lender?"

"Yes—yes sir. I—I wanted to keep it a secret. He was threatening to denounce me to my chiefs if I did not pay today—you know what that would have meant, sir?" The boy spoke hurriedly now, imploringly. "I had written to my sister, telling her all about it. At a quarter to twelve I received a telegram from her—saying she would help me. Here it is, sir." The lad fished out a crumpled telegram from his pocket, held it out to Q. Q., who took it without removing his eyes from the soul under their scrutiny. "I dashed across to the post office to send a telegram to him telling him that my sister was paying—to take no action." The lad stopped breathlessly, his eyes miserably on Q. Q.'s inscrutable face.

The Chief glanced at the telegram.

"This is not very explicit," he said. "It merely says, 'All right, Vera.' That might mean anything. . . . Do you grasp the point of this questioning, Johnson?"

"No—no sir," the lad stuttered. "I—I don't think I do."

"The point is that Mr. Arbuthnot was murdered in his room at ten minutes past twelve. On your story, you left the building at ten minutes before the hour. Where were you at ten minutes past?"

"In the post office, sir."

"From ten minutes to the hour to ten minutes past? Twenty minutes?"

"I had to wait in a queue, sir."

"And then you returned to the Registry?"

"Yes sir. I took the file I said I wanted, and went back to my room. It was then I first heard the news about poor Mr. Arbuthnot, sir."

"H'm! Well, the post-office records will prove the truth of your statements. Your telegram will note the time it was handed in. You say that was ten past?"

"No sir. The telegram was handed in at a quarter past. At ten past I was still waiting in the queue."

"Quarter past? How long, Johnson, did it actually take you to run down from the corridor where your room is situated, to the post office?"

"Under two minutes, sir."

"And you are sure—*quite sure*—that it was at ten minutes to the hour—and not just after ten minutes *past*—that you ran to the post office?" The implication in that question was terribly obvious.

"Yes sir."

"Well, I am going to test the truth of your story. Now listen to me—"

Again the Chief explained the method he was going to employ. "To answer is the only way of clearing yourself from the suspicion that now rests upon you," he said.

"Yes sir. But—believe me, sir—I know nothing about poor Mr. Arbuthnot's death—nothing—I swear to you, sir!" The lad was evidently horribly alarmed. "I was in the post office at the time, sir!"

Q. Q.'s eyes probed him.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Johnson. . . . And concentrate your mind on putting, as rapidly as possible, an associated word to the word I shall give you."

The boy gulped.

"Bread!"—dot-dot-dot.

"Butter!" He forced himself to the strain of an answer, hit the natural association which all his predecessors had given.

"Sea!"—dot-dot.

"Shore!"

"Horse!"—dot-dot-dot-dot.

"Hoof!"

Q. Q. took him right through the list, dotting the intervals of his hesitations, scribbling down his replies. The lad answered irregularly, spasmodically, a perspiration of distress upon his forehead, a look of terror in the eyes that stared as though hypnotized at Q. Q. It was all he could do, evidently, to keep his mind to the focus of what was required of him, and some of his associations were wildly wide—desperately clutched at in his anxiety to give a reply not too long delayed.

The Chief finished his inquisition, examined the paper with the irregular rows of dots, the final answers, compared them with the records of the others.

"H'm!" he grunted, his face inscrutable.

The lad sat staring at him, his hands twitching, scarcely daring —it would seem—to breathe.

The telephone bell rang sharply. Q. Q. took up the instrument.

"Hello? . . . Yes—Quayne speaking. . . . Who's that? . . . Oh, Sebright? . . . What? You've got your man? . . . Who is it?

. . . Oglethorpe?" Q. Q. smiled, grimly. "Beware of those clear cases, Sebright. They're often only the mirror of your own ideas. I'm afraid you'll have to release Oglethorpe—with apologies. . . . Yes. . . . *Why?* Because I happen to have caught the man, and it isn't Oglethorpe. I'll hand him over to you presently. . . . By the way, Sebright, where are you ringing up from? . . . The F. O.? Good! Would you mind asking Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan to step round here again as soon as possible? I've something important to speak to him about. . . . Thanks." Q. Q. put back the receiver.

Young Johnson had sprung to his feet, stood quivering while Q. Q. talked. I watched him narrowly, my muscles tense to leap on him should be offer a sudden violence. There was a wild look in his frightened eyes.

"I—I didn't do it, sir!" he stammered.

The Chief smiled at him.

"I know you didn't," he said.

The boy stared, bewildered.

"Then—then—why have you asked Mr. Vaughan to come here, sir? You're not going to—to tell him about that money-lender?" There was a new and scarcely less acute alarm in his face. "For God's sake, don't, sir! Mr. Vaughan would report me at once!"

The Chief smiled again, more kindly.

"Not that, either. This experience in dealing with money-lenders will suffice you for a lifetime, I trust. That's all I have to say to you, Mr. Johnson." He nodded in dismissal.

Young Johnson still could not quite grasp the situation.

"You mean—you don't want me any more, sir?"

"No. And if you should meet Mr. Vaughan on your way back to your office, say nothing to him. Good afternoon."

Q. Q. turned back to those enigmatic papers which held a secret that tantalized my curiosity to a sudden fever-pitch.

"Goo-good-afternoon, sir!" The lad went out of that room, haunted for him by a dreadful ordeal, with a gladly eager haste that was almost a flight.

When he had gone, I looked across to the Chief.

"You've got your man, sir?"

Q. Q. glanced up at me, his face grimly satisfied in its expression.

"Yes."

"It looked bad for young Johnson, sir—and he seemed to stumble terribly when you applied your test." I was, of course,

fishing, but it had in fact seemed to me more than once that the lad must be betraying himself, so desperate were his hesitations.

"Pooh! His time-intervals were of course wildly erratic—what one would expect from the strain he was undergoing—but on the key-words he was no more erratic than elsewhere. Now, this record"—he held up another sheet of paper—"is curiously regular—the shortest intervals of any—till we come to those same vital words. And then there is a sudden seventy-five to a hundred-percent increase—almost imperceptible while he spoke, but evident enough here. Moreover—automatically in his first quickness he gave the curious association *'hide'* to the word *'cupboard'*—the only one to do so; after that, recognizing his slip, he was on his guard—a little too much on his guard." He chuckled with satisfaction. "That's the man, Mr. Creighton!"

"Which man, sir?"

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan."

"D'Arcy Vaughan!" I echoed the name in astonishment. Mr. Vaughan had seemed to me the most normal of any of those six men who had sat in that chair—his answers unvarying in their glib rapidity. "And—you're going to arrest him, sir? Directly he comes in?" I thrilled with the sense of imminent crisis.

"Not quite as soon as that, Mr. Creighton. What I have here is evidence enough for myself. But it is not legal evidence. I'm going to get that legal evidence. I'm going to get a signed confession." His tone was curt with a confidence I did not share.

"D'Arcy Vaughan—if he's the man, sir—doesn't seem to me the sort of fellow to give confessions easily," I ventured. "He must have immense nerve to behave as he did in this office."

"He has—a phenomenal nerve. But even the strongest nerves can be broken down, Mr. Creighton." Q. Q. leaned back in his chair and smiled at me with a grim blandness. "You've heard of the third degree, I suppose? It usually implies some physical pain to the prisoner under examination. We're a little too civilized for that. I'm going to put Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan through what we may call the fourth degree—considerably more subtle and quite as efficacious."

"I don't understand, sir. Do I come in on this?"

"You, Mr. Creighton, will merely quietly get up and lock that door behind Mr. Vaughan when he enters, and then you will return to your desk, and get on with your work in absolute silence. You will not utter a word, unless I speak to you."

"Very good, sir." I was utterly baffled to guess what scheme

Q. Q. had in his mind, but it was with an intense impatience that I watched the minute-hand slip round the clock. It was close on five. Perhaps Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan would after all smell a rat—not come? A feverish anxiety for his appearance mounted in me, obscured the petty routine task on which I was engaged.

The office telephone-bell rang, startling me in the tension of my nerves. The Chief answered it.

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan? Show him in, please." From his tone, he might have been admitting the most casual of visitors, but he smiled—a smile of intimate satisfaction—at me as he put back the receiver.

The door opened. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, sprucely elegant, his monocle in place, his good-looking features happily serene, entered the room. I rose, went unobtrusively behind him, locked the door, returned to my place. Mr. Vaughan advanced toward Q. Q.

"Well, Mr. Quayne," he said, in a voice that struck me as oddly cheerful for a man whose office had been the scene of such tragic events, "you've heard what's happened in this terrible business? They've arrested Oglethorpe—poor, queer old Oglethorpe! I would never have believed it possible, but Scotland Yard seems quite certain—and it knows its business, I suppose. Awful! Terrible—terrible!"

"Yes, I had heard," replied Q. Q. coolly.

Mr. Vaughan sat down in the chair, carefully deposited his glossy silk hat on a corner of Q. Q.'s desk, and casually crossed one nicely creased trouser-leg over the other. If he was indeed the man, I could not but admire his perfect aplomb.

"And now, Mr. Quayne," he said, "before we come to whatever you want to see me about, there's a little thing I'm curious to know. Did the results of your psycho-analytic test by any chance coincide with those of the police?"

Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, tapped his finger-tips together.

"No, he replied, "they did not."

Mr. Vaughan smiled.

"Ah?" His tone politely indicated a previous skepticism that was now justified. "I trust you psycho-analysts will have the grace to acknowledge at least one failure of your magic methods."

Q. Q. continued to tap his finger-tips together as he smiled blandly.

"It was not a failure," he said.

"Not a failure? But—I do not understand—I thought you said—" Mr. Vaughan was all courtesy, a rather malicious cour-

tesy, perhaps, in a gestured sketch of baffled comprehension. He smiled frankly, pleasantly, at his interlocutor.

"It was not a failure." Q. Q. had spoken these words in the quietest, most dulcet of his tones. He rose from his chair, stood erect, spoke in a voice that to me seemed like a thunderclap in its sudden stern vehemence. *"Own up, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan!* You're caught!"

The man had sprung up from his chair also in an indignation that, whether real or simulated, was impressive in its apparent authenticity.

"What do you mean?" His voice quivered, but it was with anger. "What are you trying to suggest?"

"I am suggesting, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan,"—Q. Q.'s tone was sharply explicit,—"that you are a spy in your own department, that you were betraying official secrets, that Mr. Arbuthnot detected you, called you into his room this morning as you passed on your way to lunch and taxed you with it, that he had the imprudence, perhaps, to threaten you—possibly in self-defense—with his revolver during the altercation, that you seized that revolver and shot him dead, that hearing some one come to the door, you then sprang into the clothes-cupboard and dodged out again directly the coast was clear. Is that definite enough for you?"

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan looked as though he were going to strike his accuser in the face. I saw his fists clench, the lips go blanched under his little dark mustache. He mastered himself with an effort.

"Mr. Quayne, if you were a younger man, I would thrash you for this outrageous imputation!" he gasped in his wrath. "As it is, you have chosen to utter this monstrous slander before a witness." He jerked his hand in my direction. "You shall hear from my solicitors!" He strode toward the door.

Fascinated, I watched him as he reached it, tugged at the handle, twisted it in vain. Then he swung round again, his face ablaze with fury.

"Open that door at once!" he cried. "What does this mean?"

"It means, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan," said Q. Q. in his most coldly level tones, "that you are a prisoner in this room until such time as you dictate and sign your confession."

The man glared at him, livid. He could scarcely speak in the rage which choked him.

"This is an outrage—a monstrous outrage! You dare, Mr. Quayne—*you dare* to subject a civil servant of my standing to this gross indignity! To illegal detention! Have a care, Mr. Quayne! You are laying yourself open to an action which I will fight through court after court till I ruin you!"

Q. Q. smiled grimly.

"You may have another case to fight in the courts before that, Mr. Vaughan. It is useless to wrestle with that door. You cannot open it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had once more switched round to the door, was tugging at it, twisting at the handle in an almost maniacal fury of anger. He faced round again to Q. Q.

"Open it, I say! Open it," he choked, "or—"

"Or nothing, Mr. Vaughan." Q. Q. was smoothly unruffled. "You will do nothing. You will merely in due course, when you are tired of raging at that door, sit down in that chair and dictate your confession." With which, Q. Q. himself calmly resumed his seat, picked up a paper on his desk and apparently gave it his undivided cool attention.

Mr. Vaughan stared at him for a moment, the muscles of his face twitching, his eyes murderous if ever a man's were—and then he strode straight across to me.

"You!" The violence in his voice startled me, half-prepared for it though I was. "Open that door at once—or I charge you as an accomplice in this felony! *Felony*—you understand! Penal servitude!" Ugly menace looked out of him. I gripped myself, remembered Q. Q.'s orders, remained stolidly silent, bent over my work again. *"Do you hear?"* My shoulder was violently shaken. "Open that door, or—" He had no threat vicious enough for his anger.

I glanced at him, as coolly as I could,—obviously my cue was to imitate the Chief, at that moment quite unperturbed, apparently engrossed in the perusal of some document,—saw the ferocity in his glare, saw his fingers working—itching for a weapon which, thank Heaven, he did not possess—and remained dumb. Not only dumb, but, as well as I could feign it, deaf! Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, I could see in the instant before my eyes went down to my work again, could have screamed blasphemies in the extremity of his exasperation. The uncanny completeness of our silence sent a gleam of fright into his eyes. Then once more they went impotently murderous. I guessed, even as with an effort

of self-command I turned my gaze away from him, that he was speculating whether he would have a chance in a hand-to-hand mix-up with the pair of us.

Apparently he decided that he would not. I felt him remove his presence from over me, glanced up discreetly to see him once more in the center of the room, facing the Chief.

"Mr. Quayne!" He controlled his voice to a harsh similitude of normality. "Do you mean that you have the insane intention of keeping me a prisoner in this room until I sign a confession of a murder of which I know nothing?"

Q. Q. raised his eyes to him, as though only just again aware of his presence.

"You are begging the question, Mr. Vaughan," he said quietly, turning over a page of his papers while he spoke. "I have all the relevant information. I require only your confession. And it is certainly my intention to keep you here till I get it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan achieved a short scornful laugh.

"Very well," he said. "We shall see who can wait longest." He flung himself into the chair, sat tapping with his foot upon the floor. "You yourselves cannot sit forever in this room. And when we leave it, Mr. Quayne, believe me, you shall rue this outrage!"

Mr. Quayne merely turned over another page of the document he was perusing with such concentrated attention.

His victim glared at him, opened his cigarette-case,—I noticed, maliciously, that it contained only one cigarette,—struck a match, commenced to smoke. The silence of that room, high above the neighbouring housetops, was like the grave. It perpetuated itself, continued until even I felt it a strain upon my nerves. The only sound was the deep breathing of that man in the chair adjacent to Q. Q.'s desk. Unobtrusively I kept a sharp eye upon him, alert to interpose in that sudden panther-spring I felt to be imminent. But none came. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan sat immobile, his lips pressed tight, smoking with the tiniest of puffs, evidently—I could sympathize with him—trying to economize that one and only cigarette to the last possible moment. And the silence in that room continued, persisted till it seemed to ring in my ears.

I glanced at the clock-hand. It marked half-past five.

Mr. Vaughan stirred.

"Mr. Quayne!"

Q. Q. lifted an eyebrow at him.

"How long is this madness to continue?"

"Until I get your confession." Q. Q.'s tone was quietly accep-

tive of the situation, was, without the faintest impatience, coolly confident of the final result.

"Pshaw!" The man jumped up from his chair again, paced up and down the room in febrile exasperation. Q. Q. had once more reverted to the perusal of his documents, did not so much as glance at him. The victim strode once more across to me, evidently on the impulse to make another trial of my subordinate resolution. I forced myself to remain unperceptive of his presence. I could feel the glare of his eyes upon me as I bent my own down to my work, could feel him hesitate over the utility of the appeal—or of the threat. He renounced either. I heard his soft footfalls on the carpet recede away to the center of the room, heard them go toward Q. Q.'s desk, heard the sudden creak of his chair as he flung himself down into it again.

When, discreetly, I glanced up, I saw him sitting there, his fingers drumming on his knee, the cigarette short between his lips glowing in a momentary forgetfulness of economy.

The silence continued. The ticking of the clock became insistent, an obsession to the ear. Its hands slipped round—six o'clock —a quarter past. Outside, the light began to die out of the sky. Within the room there were already shadows. Long ago Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had got to the end of his smoke. For what seemed an age he had sat like a statue, utterly motionless. What was he thinking, I wondered. And still the silence remained unbroken.

It was shattered suddenly.

"Quayne!" The man paused, waiting for a movement of Q. Q.'s head that did not occur. "I don't know how long this farce is going on—but I'll count it as mitigation if you'll give me a cigarette."

But Mr. Quayne had apparently lost the sense of hearing. He merely picked another from the pile of documents at his hand.

Once more the room relapsed into silence—into a silence that grew haunted, terrifying, vibrant with mysterious unuttered menace as the twilight deepened in the room—a silence that *rang* and yet was soundless. A sudden mutter from the man in the chair seemed only to intensify it. How long indeed was this going on? I myself grew unnerved with the strain, felt the impulse to use my voice—to break this uncanny hush—rise up in me, almost irresistible. Had I been sitting there with the guilt of murder on my conscience, I could not have refrained from shouting it aloud to get relief at any cost from this intolerable ordeal of soundless-

ness wherein the stark fundamental outlines of one's soul seemed automatically to emerge. I should have screamed that guilt, in hysteria, long ago. But still the man I could half-see in the gloom sat motionless and silent in his chair. Still, Q. Q. remained, holding up a document to get the last of the light, seemingly oblivious of his presence. For myself, I had given up even the pretense of work. I sat, gripped in that dead hush, and waited—waited—while the shadows thickened.

Suddenly I heard a sound—the faintest little whir; and then—

"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"

The voice came out of the gloom, silent, deep-toned, vibrant with authority—the voice of the murdered Arbuthnot! Even to me, who could an instant later guess its source, it came with a shock to my nerves, uncanny from the formless shadows of the room. To the man in the chair, it came with the full force of a supernatural presence—sternly inexorable in a ghostly omnipotence. He sprang to his feet, stood quivering.

"What was that? Quayne, did you hear that? *Arbuthnot's voice!* I—I—no—it couldn't be—couldn't be! Quayne,"—his voice was strained with terror,—"let me out of this! I'm going mad! I can't stand it any longer!"

Q. Q. apparently did not hear him. He did not move. One hand still held the document up to the last glimmer of outside light; the other was out of sight beneath his desk. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan gasped. Once more he turned toward me, and I saw his two hands go slowly, quiveringly, up toward his head as he stood silhouetted against the window. The man was gripped in a paroxysm of terror at those suddenly vocal shadows all around him—*at himself.*

"No," I heard him whisper to himself, "no! It couldn't have been! It couldn't have been!"

And then once more came that solemn, deep-toned, authoritative voice:

"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"

A choked scream broke from the tortured wretch.

"No—no! Quiet, Arbuthnot! *Quiet—for God's sake!* I—I can't bear it! I—I'll tell—I'll confess! I'll confess! Quayne—*Quayne!"* His voice came almost in a shriek from the shadows which hid his face. "I'll confess—I'll confess! Take it down—I'll confess!"

Q. Q. layed down his papers.

"Take down what Mr. Vaughan dictates, Mr. Creighton," he said, quietly. "Resume your chair, Mr. Vaughan." He touched

the switch by his desk, and the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, no longer the spruce, well-groomed civil servant, but a haggard, wild-eyed wretch,—I was startled at the havoc the ordeal had made in him,—obeyed like a creature drained of volition, dropped heavily into his chair. I took up my pen and wrote as, quaveringly, gaspingly, the utterly unnerved, broken man began his confession. It was a confession of official secrets betrayed, sent by agony-column code-messages to a great foreign commercial organization to which they were of immense utility, of—precisely as Q. Q. had divined—Arbuthnot's having stopped him as he went along the corridor to his lunch, taxed him with it, of a wild alarm, a determination to suppress this danger at once, of the beginnings of a murderous struggle in which Arbuthnot had snatched the revolver from his drawer, of another snatch at that revolver which had seized it, of the sudden shot, of Oglethorpe at the door, of a spring into the clothes-cupboard, and a moment later—when Oglethorpe had dashed out again, horrified at the discovery—a quick rush along the corridor, unobserved, to lunch.

Q. Q. listened, inscrutable, to the end.

"Now sign, Mr. Vaughan," he said in his quiet level voice.

The man got up from his chair, moved toward my desk—stopped suddenly.

"No!" he cried. Obviously he made a great effort to pull himself together, to resume command of himself, seemed to succeed. "No! I won't sign!" He laughed like a maniac. "It's only your word against mine—both of you—and I'll swear it's a fabrication—a tissue of lies! I'm not going to sign away my life because you played a trick on me! How you did it, I don't know—but trick I'm sure it was!"

He stood glowering defiance at Q. Q.

"As you like Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief quietly. "It makes really no difference whether you sign or not. Just listen a moment!" He bent forward, touched something on his desk. "Another little trick, Mr. Vaughan." He smiled pleasantly.

To my own astonishment there issued into the room, startlingly lifelike, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan's voice in a recapitulated, word-for-word recital of his crime. The first few sentences of it were sufficient—Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan raised his hand. To his first amazement had succeeded a sudden bitterness of comprehension.

"That's enough," he said. "I don't want to hear it over again."

He controlled his voice to a cynical appreciation. "A dictaphone, of course?"

"A double-barreled one, Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief, still pleasantly. "With a blank record waiting for you."

Vaughan glared at Q. Q. in a sudden last flash of ferocity. "Curse you and your infernal cunning tricks!" he said. "All right —I may as well sign." He came across to my desk, scrawled a signature at the foot of the paper I presented to him, turned again with a snarl to the Chief. "Now what are you going to do?"

Q. Q. smiled grimly, took off the telephone receiver, asked for a number.

"Sebright? . . . Ah, Quayne speaking. Just come round here, will you? . . . I've got that man for you. Yes—signed confession. He's only waiting for you."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan swayed on his feet, one hand feeling blindly for support at the edge of my desk.

"Mr. Quayne," he said, his eyes closed, "it would be Christian charity to give me a drink—brandy!"

He had finished my flask by the time Sebright arrived.

Robert Barr

LORD CHIZELRIGG'S MISSING FORTUNE

Episode from *The Triumphs of Eugene Valmont,* by Robert Barr, reprinted by permission of D. Appleton & Company.

The name of the late Lord Chizelrigg never comes to my mind without instantly suggesting that of Mr. T. A. Edison. I never saw the late Lord Chizelrigg, and I have met Mr. Edison only twice in my life, yet the two men are linked in my memory, and it was a remark the latter once made that in great measure enabled me to solve the mystery which the former had wrapped round his actions.

There is no memorandum at hand to tell me the year in which those two meetings with Edison took place. I received a note from the Italian Ambassador in Paris requesting me to wait upon him

at the Embassy. I learned that on the next day a deputation was to set out from the Embassy to one of the chief hotels, there to make a call in state upon the great American inventor, and formally present to him various insignia accompanying certain honours which the King of Italy had conferred upon him. As many Italian nobles of high rank had been invited, and as these dignitaries would not only be robed in the costumes pertaining to their orders, but in many cases would wear jewels of almost inestimable value, my presence was desired in the belief that I might perhaps be able to ward off any attempt on the part of the deft-handed gentry who might possibly make an effort to gain these treasures, and I may add, with perhaps some little self-gratification, no *contretemps* occurred.

Mr. Edison, of course, had long before received notification of the hour at which the deputation would wait upon him, but when we entered the large parlour assigned to the inventor, it was evident to me at a glance that the celebrated man had forgotten all about the function. He stood by a bare table, from which the cloth had been jerked and flung into a corner, and upon that table were placed several bits of black and greasy machinery—cog wheels, pulleys, bolts, etc. These seemingly belonged to a French workman who stood on the other side of the table, with one of the parts in his grimy hand. Edison's own hands were not too clean, for he had palpably been examining the material, and conversing with the workman, who wore the ordinary long blouse of an iron craftsman in a small way. I judged him to be a man with a little shop of his own in some back street, who did odd jobs of engineering, assisted perhaps by a skilled helper or two, and a few apprentices. Edison looked sternly towards the door as the solemn procession filed in, and there was a trace of annoyance on his face at the interruption, mixed with a shade of perplexity as to what this gorgeous display all meant. The Italian is as ceremonious as the Spaniard where a function is concerned, and the official who held the ornate box which contained the jewellery resting on a velvet cushion, stepped slowly forward, and came to a stand in front of the bewildered American. Then the Ambassador, in sonorous voice, spoke some gracious words regarding the friendship existing between the United States and Italy, expressed a wish that their rivalry should ever take the form of benefits conferred upon the human race, and instanced the honoured recipient as the most notable example the world had yet produced of a man bestowing blessings upon all nations in the arts of peace. The

eloquent Ambassador concluded by saying that, at the command of his Royal master, it was both his duty and his pleasure to present, and so forth and so forth.

Mr. Edison, visibly ill at ease, nevertheless made a suitable reply in the fewest possible words, and the *étalage* being thus at an end, the noblemen, headed by their Ambassador, slowly retired, myself forming the tail of the procession. Inwardly I deeply sympathised with the French workman who thus unexpectedly found himself confronted by so much magnificence. He cast one wild look about him, but saw that his retreat was cut off unless he displaced some of these gorgeous grandees. He tried then to shrink into himself, and finally stood helpless like one paralysed. In spite of Republican institutions, there is deep down in every Frenchman's heart a respect and awe for official pageants, sumptuously staged and costumed as this one was. But he likes to view it from afar, and supported by his fellows, not thrust incongruously into the midst of things, as was the case with this panic-stricken engineer. As I passed out, I cast a glance over my shoulder at the humble artisan content with a profit of a few francs a day, and at the millionaire inventor opposite him. Edison's face, which during the address had been cold and impassive, reminding me vividly of a bust of Napoleon, was now all aglow with enthusiasm as he turned to his humble visitor. He cried joyfully to the workman:

"A minute's demonstration is worth an hour's explanation. I'll call round to-morrow at your shop, about ten o'clock, and show you how to make the thing work."

I lingered in the hall until the Frenchman came out, then, introducing myself to him, asked the privilege of visiting his shop next day at ten. This was accorded with that courtesy which you will always find among the industrial classes of France, and next day I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Edison. During our conversation I complimented him on his invention of the incandescent electric light, and this was the reply that has ever remained in my memory:

"It was not an invention, but a discovery. We knew what we wanted; a carbonised tissue, which would withstand the electric current in a vacuum for, say, a thousand hours. If no such tissue existed, then the incandescent light, as we know it, was not possible. My assistants started out to find this tissue, and we simply carbonised everything we could lay our hands on, and ran the current through it in a vacuum. At last we struck the right thing,

as we were bound to do if we kept on long enough, and if the thing existed. Patience and hard work will overcome any obstacle."

This belief has been of great assistance to me in my profession. I know the idea is prevalent that a detective arrives at his solutions in a dramatic way through following clues invisible to the ordinary man. This doubtless frequently happens, but, as a general thing, the patience and hard work which Mr. Edison commends is a much safer guide. Very often the following of excellent clues had led me to disaster, as was the case with my unfortunate attempt to solve the mystery of the five hundred diamonds.

As I was saying, I never think of the late Lord Chizelrigg without remembering Mr. Edison at the same time, and yet the two were very dissimilar. I suppose Lord Chizelrigg was the most useless man that ever lived, while Edison is the opposite.

One day my servant brought into me a card on which was engraved "Lord Chizelrigg."

"Show his lordship in," I said, and there appeared a young man of perhaps twenty-four or twenty-five, well dressed, and of most charming manners, who, nevertheless, began his interview by asking a question such as had never before been addressed to me, and which, if put to a solicitor, or other professional man, would have been answered with some indignation. Indeed, I believe it is a written or unwritten low of the legal profession that the acceptance of such a proposal as Lord Chizelrigg made to me, would if proved, result in the disgrace and ruin of the lawyer.

"Monsieur Valmont," began Lord Chizelrigg, "do you ever take up cases on speculation?"

"On speculation, sir? I do not think I understand you."

His lordship blushed like a girl, and stammered slightly as he attempted an explanation.

"What I mean is, do you accept a case on a contingent fee? That is to say, monsieur—er—well, not to put too fine a point upon it, no results, no pay."

I replied somewhat severely:

"Such an offer has never been made to me, and I may say at once that I should be compelled to decline it were I favoured with the opportunity. In the cases submitted to me, I devote my time and attention to their solution. I try to deserve success, but I cannot command it, and as in the interim I must live, I am reluctantly compelled to make a charge for my time, at least. I believe the doctor sends in his bill, though the patient dies."

The young man laughed uneasily, and seemed almost too embarrassed to proceed, but finally he said:

"Your illustration strikes home with greater accuracy than probably you imagined when you uttered it. I have just paid my last penny to the physician who attended my late uncle, Lord Chizelrigg, who died six months ago. I am fully aware that the suggestion I made may seem like a reflection upon your skill, or rather, as implying a doubt regarding it. But I should be grieved, monsieur, if you fell into such an error. I could have come here and commissioned you to undertake some elucidation of the strange situation in which I find myself, and I make no doubt you would have accepted the task if your numerous engagements had permitted. Then, if you failed, I should have been unable to pay you, for I am practically bankrupt. My whole desire, therefore, was to make an honest beginning, and to let you know exactly how I stand. If you succeed, I shall be a rich man; if you do not succeed, I shall be what I am now, penniless. Have I made it plain now why I began with a question which you had every right to resent?"

"Perfectly plain, my lord, and your candour does you credit."

I was very much taken with the unassuming manners of the young man, and his evident desire to accept no service under false pretences. When I had finished my sentence the pauper nobleman rose to his feet, and bowed.

"I am very much your debtor, monsieur, for your courtesy in receiving me, and can only beg pardon for occupying your time on a futile quest. I wish you good-morning, monsieur."

"One moment, my lord," I rejoined, waving him to his chair again. "Although I am unprepared to accept a commission on the terms you suggest, I may, nevertheless, be able to offer a hint or two that will prove of service to you. I think I remember the announcement of Lord Chizelrigg's death. He was somewhat eccentric, was he not?"

"Eccentric?" said the young man, with a slight laugh, seating himself again—"well, *rather*!"

"I vaguely remember that he was accredited with the possession of something like twenty thousand acres of land?"

"Twenty-seven thousand, as a matter of fact," replied my visitor.

"Have you fallen heir to the lands as well as to the title?"

"Oh, yes; the estate was entailed. The old gentleman could

not divert it from me if he would, and I rather suspect that fact must have been the cause of some worry to him."

"But surely, my lord, a man who owns, as one might say, a principality in this wealthy realm of England, cannot be penniless?"

Again the young man laughed.

"Well, no," he replied, thrusting his hand in his pocket and bringing to light a few brown coppers, and a white silver piece. "I possess enough money to buy some food to-night, but not enough to dine at the Hotel Cecil. You see, it is like this. I belong to a somewhat ancient family, various members of whom went the pace, and mortgaged their acres up the hilt. I could not raise a further penny on my estates were I to try my hardest, because at the time the money was lent, land was much more valuable than it is to-day. Agricultural depression, and all that sort of thing, have, if I may put it so, left me a good many thousands worse off than if I had no land at all. Besides this, during my late uncle's life, Parliament, on his behalf, intervened once or twice, allowing him in the first place to cut valuable timber, and in the second place to sell the pictures of Chizelrigg Chase at Christie's for figures which made one's mouth water."

"And what became of the money?" I asked, whereupon once more this genial nobleman laughed.

"That is exactly what I came up in the lift to learn if Monsieur Valmont could discover."

"My lord, you interest me," I said, quite truly, with an uneasy apprehension that I should take up his case after all, for I liked the young man already. His lack of pretence appealed to me, and that sympathy which is so universal among my countrymen enveloped him, as I may say, quite independent of my own will.

"My uncle," went on Lord Chizelrigg, "was somewhat of an anomaly in our family. He must have been a reversal to a very, very ancient type; a type of which we have no record. He was as miserly as his forefathers were prodigal. When he came into the title and estate some twenty years ago, he dismissed the whole retinue of servants, and, indeed, was defendant in several cases at law where retainers of our family brought suit against him for wrongful dismissal, or dismissal without a penny compensation in lieu of notice. I am pleased to say he lost all his cases, and when he pleaded poverty, got permission to sell a certain number of heirlooms, enabling him to make compensation, and giving him

something on which to live. These heirlooms at auction sold so unexpectedly well, that my uncle acquired a taste, as it were, of what might be done. He could always prove that the rents went to the mortgagees, and that he had nothing on which to exist, so on several occasions he obtained permission from the courts to cut timber and sell pictures, until he denuded the estate and made an empty barn of the old manor house. He lived like any labourer, occupying himself sometimes as a carpenter, sometimes as a blacksmith; indeed, he made a blacksmith's shop of the library, one of the most noble rooms in Britain, containing thousands of valuable books which again and again he applied for permission to sell, but this privilege was never granted to him. I find on coming into the property that my uncle quite persistently evaded the law, and depleted this superb collection, book by book, surreptitiously through dealers in London. This, of course, would have got him into deep trouble if it had been discovered before his death, but now the valuable volumes are gone, and there is no redress. Many of them are doubtless in America, or in museums and collections of Europe."

"You wish me to trace them, perhaps?" I interpolated.

"Oh, no; they are past praying for. The old man made tens of thousands by the sale of the timber, and other of thousands by disposing of the pictures. The house is denuded of its fine old furniture, which was immensely valuable, and then the books, as I have said, must have brought in the revenue of a prince, if he got anything like their value, and you may be sure he was shrewd enough to know their worth. Since the last refusal of the courts to allow him further relief, as he termed it, which was some seven years ago, he had quite evidently been disposing of books and furniture by a private sale, in defiance of the law. At that time I was under age, but my guardians opposed his application to the courts, and demanded an account of the moneys already in his hands. The judges upheld the opposition of my guardians, and refused to allow a further spoliation of the estate, but they did not grant the accounting my guardians asked, because the proceeds of the former sales were entirely at the disposal of my uncle, and were sanctioned by the law to permit him to live as befitted his station. If he lived meagrely instead of lavishly, as my guardians contended, that, the judges said, was his affair, and there the matter ended.

"My uncle took a violent dislike to me on account of this opposition to his last application, although, of course, I had noth-

ing whatever to do with the matter. He lived like a hermit, mostly in the library, and was waited upon by an old man and his wife, and these three were the only inhabitants of a mansion that could comfortably house a hundred. He visited nobody, and would allow no one to approach Chizelrigg Chase. In order that all who had the misfortune to have dealing with him should continue to endure trouble after his death, he left what might be called a will, but which rather may be termed a letter to me. Here is a copy of it.

"'My dear Tom,—You will find your fortune between a couple of sheets of paper in the library.

"'Your affectionate uncle,

"'Reginald Moran, Earl of Chizelrigg.'"

"I should doubt if that were a legal will," said I.

"It doesn't need to be," replied the young man with a smile. "I am next-of-kin, and heir to everything he possessed, although, of course, he might have given his money elsewhere if he had chosen to do so. Why he did not bequeath it to some institution, I do not know. He knew no man personally except his own servants, whom he misused and starved, but, as he told them, he misused and starved himself, so they had no cause to grumble. He said he was treating them like one of the family. I suppose he thought it would cause me more worry and anxiety if he concealed the money and put me on the wrong scent, which I am convinced he has done, than to leave it openly to any person or charity."

"I need not ask if you have searched the library?"

"Searched it? Why, there never was such a search since the world began!"

"Possibly you put the task into incompetent hands?"

"You are hinting, Monsieur Valmont, that I engaged others until my money was gone, then came to you with a speculative proposal. Let me assure you such is not the case. Incompetent hands, I grant you, but the hands were my own. For the past six months I have lived practically as my uncle lived. I have rummaged that library from floor to ceiling. It was left in a frightful state, littered with old newspapers, accounts, and what-not. Then, of course, there were the books remaining in the library, still a formidable collection."

"Was your uncle a religious man?"

"I could not say. I surmise not. You see, I was unacquainted

with him, and never saw him until after his death. I fancy he was not religious, otherwise he could not have acted as he did. Still, he proved himself a man of such twisted mentality that anything is possible."

"I knew a case once where an heir who expected a large sum of money was bequeathed a family Bible, which he threw into the fire, learning afterwards, to his dismay, that it contained many thousands of pounds in Bank of England notes, the object of the devisor being to induce the legatee to read the good Book or suffer through the neglect of it."

"I have searched the Scriptures," said the youthful Earl with a laugh, "but the benefit has been moral rather than material."

"Is there any chance that your uncle has deposited his wealth in a bank, and has written a cheque for the amount, leaving it between two leaves of a book?"

"Anything is possible, monsieur, but I think that highly improbable. I have gone through every tome, page by page, and I suspect very few of the volumes have been opened for the last twenty years.

"How much money do you estimate he accumulated?"

"He must have cleared more than a hundred thousand pounds, but speaking of banking it, I would like to say that my uncle evinced a deep distrust of banks, and never drew a cheque in his life so far as I am aware. All accounts were paid in gold by this old steward, who first brought the receipted bill in to my uncle, and then received the exact amount, after having left the room, and waited until he was rung for, so that he might not learn the repository from which my uncle drew his store. I believe if the money is ever found it will be in gold, and I am very sure that this will was written, if we may call it a will, to put us on the wrong scent."

"Have you had the library cleared out?"

"Oh, no, it is practically as my uncle left it. I realised that if I were to call in help, it would be well that the new-comer found it undisturbed."

"You were quite right, my lord. You say you examined all the papers?"

"Yes; so far as that is concerned, the room has been very fairly gone over, but nothing that was in it the day my uncle died has been removed, not even his anvil."

"His anvil?"

"Yes; I told you he made a blacksmith's shop, as well as bed-

room, of the library. It is a huge room, with a great fire-place at one end which formed an excellent forge. He and the steward built the forge in the eastern fire-place, of brick and clay, with their own hands, and erected there a second-hand-blacksmith's bellows."

"What work did he do at his forge?"

"Oh, anything that was required about the place. He seems to have been a very expert ironworker. He would never buy a new implement for the garden or the house so long as he could get one second-hand, and he never bought anything second-hand while at his forge he might repair what was already in use. He kept an old cob, on which he used to ride through the park, and he always put the shoes on this cob himself, the steward informs me, so he must have understood the use of blacksmith's tools. He made a carpenter's shop of the chief drawing-room and erected a bench there. I think a very useful mechanic was spoiled when my uncle became an earl."

"You have been living at the Chase since your uncle died?"

"If you call it living, yes. The old steward and his wife have been looking after me, as they looked after my uncle, and, seeing me day after day, coatless and covered with dust, I imagine they think me a second edition of the old man."

"Does the steward know the money is missing?"

"No; no one knows it but myself. This will was left on the anvil, in an envelope addressed to me."

"Your statement is exceedingly clear, Lord Chizelrigg, but I confess I don't see much daylight through it. Is there a pleasant country around Chizelrigg Chase?"

"Very; especially at this season of the year. In autumn and winter the house is a little draughty. It needs several thousand pounds to put it in repair."

"Draughts do not matter in the summer. I have been long enough in England not to share the fear of my countrymen for a *courant d'air*. Is there a spare bed in the manor house, or shall I take down a cot with me, or let us say a hammock?"

"Really," stammered the earl, blushing again, "you must not think I detailed all these circumstances in order to influence you to take up what may be a hopeless case. I, of course, am deeply interested, and, therefore, somewhat prone to be carried away when I begin a recital of my uncle's eccentricities. If I receive your permission, I will call on you again in a month or two. To tell you the truth, I borrowed a little money from the old steward,

and visited London to see my legal advisers, hoping that in the circumstances I may get permission to sell something that will keep me from starvation. When I spoke of the house being denuded I meant relatively, of course. There are still a good many antiquities which would doubtless bring me in a comfortable sum of money. I have been borne up by the belief that I should find my uncle's gold. Lately, I have been beset by a suspicion that the old gentleman thought the library the only valuable asset left, and for this reason wrote his note, thinking I would be afraid to sell anything from that room. The old rascal must have made a pot of money out of those shelves. The catalogue shows that there was a copy of the first book printed in England by Caxton, and several priceless Shakespeares, as well as many other volumes that a collector would give a small fortune for. All these are gone. I think when I show this to be the case, the authorities cannot refuse me the right to sell something, and, if I get this permission, I shall at once call upon you."

"Nonsense, Lord Chizelrigg. Put your application in motion, if you like. Meanwhile I beg of you to look upon me as a more substantial banker than your old steward. Let us enjoy a good dinner together at the Cecil to-night, if you will do me the honour to be my guest. To-morrow we can leave for Chizelrigg Chase. How far is it?"

"About three hours," replied the young man, becoming as red as a new Queen Anne villa. "Really, Monsieur Valmont, you overwhelm me with your kindness, but nevertheless I accept your generous offer."

"Then that's settled. What's the name of the old steward?"

"Higgins."

"You are certain he has no knowledge of the hiding-place of this treasure?"

"Oh, quite sure. My uncle was not a man to make a confidant of any one, least of all an old babbler like Higgins."

"Well, I should like to be introduced to Higgins as a benighted foreigner. That will make him despise me and treat me like a child."

"Oh, I say," protested the earl, "I should have thought you'd lived long enough in England to have got out of the notion that we do not appreciate the foreigner. Indeed, we are the only nation in the world that extends a cordial welcome to him, rich or poor."

"*Certainement,* my lord, I should be deeply disappointed did you not take me at my proper valuation, but I cherish no delusions

regarding the contempt with which Higgins will regard me. He will look upon me as a sort of simpleton to whom the Lord had been unkind by not making England my native land. Now, Higgins must be led to believe that I am in his own class; that is, a servant of yours. Higgins and I will gossip over the fire together, should these spring evenings prove chilly, and before two or three weeks are past I shall have learned a great deal about your uncle that you never dreamed of. Higgins will talk more freely with a fellow-servant than with his master, however much he may respect that master, and then, as I am a foreigner, he will babble down to my comprehension, and I shall get details that he never would think of giving to a fellow-countryman."

The young earl's modesty in such description of his home as he had given me, left me totally unprepared for the grandeur of the mansion, one corner of which he inhabited. It is such a place as you read of in romances of the Middle Ages; not a pinnacled or turreted French château of that period, but a beautiful and substantial stone manor house of a ruddy colour, whose warm hue seemed to add a softness to the severity of its architecture. It is built round an outer and an inner courtyard and could house a thousand, rather than the hundred with which its owner had accredited it. There are many stone-mullioned windows, and one at the end of the library might well have graced a cathedral. This superb residence occupies the centre of a heavily timbered park, and from the lodge at the gates we drove at least a mile and a half under the grandest avenue of old oaks I have ever seen. It seemed incredible that the owner of all this should actually lack the ready money to pay his fare to town!

Old Higgins met us at the station with a somewhat rickety cart, to which was attached the ancient cob that the late earl used to shoe. We entered a noble hall, which probably looked the larger because of the entire absence of any kind of furniture, unless two complete suits of venerable armour which stood on either hand might be considered as furnishing. I laughed aloud when the door was shut, and the sound echoed like the merriment of ghosts from the dim timbered roof above me.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the earl.

"I am laughing to see you put your modern tall hat on that mediæval helmet."

"Oh, that's it! Well, put yours on the other. I mean no disrespect to the ancestor who wore this suit, but we are short of the

harmless, necessary hat-rack, so I put my topper on the antique helmet, and thrust the umbrella (if I have one) in behind here, and down one of his legs. Since I came in possession, a very crafty-looking dealer from London visited me, and attempted to sound me regarding the sale of these suits of armour. I gathered he would give enough money to keep me in new suits, London made, for the rest of my life, but when I endeavoured to find out if he had had commercial dealings with my prophetic uncle, he became frightened and bolted. I imagine that if I had possessed presence of mind enough to have lured him into one of our most uncomfortable dungeons, I might have learned where some of the family treasures went to. Come up these stairs, Monsieur Valmont, and I shall show you your room."

We had lunched on the train coming down, so after a wash in my own room I proceeded at once to inspect the library. It proved, indeed, a most noble apartment, and it had been scandalously used by the old reprobate, its late tenant. There were two huge fire-places, one in the middle of the north wall and the other at the eastern end. In the latter had been erected a rude brick forge, and beside the forge hung a great black bellows, smoky with usage. On a wooden block lay the anvil, and around it rested and rusted several hammers, large and small. At the western end was a glorious window filled with ancient stained glass, which, as I have said, might have adorned a cathedral. Extensive as the collection of books was, the great size of this chamber made it necessary that only the outside wall should be covered with book cases, and even these were divided by tall windows. The opposite wall was blank, with the exception of a picture here and there, and these pictures offered a further insult to the room, for they were cheap prints, mostly coloured lithographs that had appeared in Christmas numbers of London weekly journals, encased in poverty-stricken frames, hanging from nails ruthlessly driven in above them. The floor was covered with a litter of papers, in some places knee-deep, and in the corner farthest from the forge still stood the bed on which the ancient miser had died.

"Looks like a stable, doesn't it?" commented the earl, when I had finished my inspection. "I am sure the old boy simply filled it up with this rubbish to give me the trouble of examining it. Higgins tells me that up to within a month before he died the room was reasonably clear of all this muck. Of course, it had to be, or the place would have caught fire from the sparks of the forge.

The old man made Higgins gather all the papers he could find anywhere about the place, ancient accounts, newspapers, and what not, even to the brown wrapping paper you see, in which parcels came, and commanded him to strew the floor with this litter, because, as he complained, Higgins's boots on the boards made too much noise, and Higgins, who is not in the least of an inquiring mind, accepted this explanation as entirely meeting the case."

Higgins proved to be a garrulous old fellow, who needed no urging to talk about the late earl; indeed, it was almost impossible to deflect his conversation into any other channel. Twenty years' intimacy with the eccentric nobleman had largely obliterated that sense of deference with which an English servant usually approaches his master. An English underling's idea of nobility is the man who never by any possibility works with his hands. The fact that Lord Chizelrigg had toiled at the carpenter's bench; had mixed cement in the drawing-room; had caused the anvil to ring out till midnight, aroused no admiration in Higgins's mind. In addition to this, the ancient nobleman had been penuriously strict in his examination of accounts, exacting the uttermost farthing, so the humble servitor regarded his memory with supreme contempt. I realised before the drive was finished from the station to Chizelrigg Chase that there was little use of introducing me to Higgins as a foreigner and a fellow-servant. I found myself completely unable to understand what the old fellow said. His dialect was as unknown to me as the Choctaw language would have been, and the young earl was compelled to act as interpreter on the occasions when we set this garrulous talking-machine going.

The new Earl of Chizelrigg, with the enthusiasm of a boy, proclaimed himself my pupil and assistant, and said he would do whatever he was told. His thorough and fruitless search of the library had convinced him that the old man was merely chaffing him, as he put it, by leaving such a letter as he had written. His lordship was certain that the money had been hidden somewhere else; probably buried under one of the trees in the park. Of course this was possible, and represented the usual method by which a stupid person conceals treasure, yet I did not think it probable. All conversations with Higgins showed the earl to have been an extremely suspicious man; suspicious of banks, suspicious even of Bank of England notes, suspicious of every person on earth, not

omitting Higgins himself. Therefore, as I told his nephew, the miser would never allow the fortune out of his sight and immediate reach.

From the first the oddity of the forge and anvil being placed in his bedroom struck me as peculiar, and I said to the young man,——

"I'll stake my reputation that forge or anvil, or both, contain the secret. You see, the old gentleman worked sometimes till midnight, for Higgins could hear his hammering. If he used hard coal on the forge the fire would last through the night, and being in continual terror of thieves, as Higgins says, barricading the castle every evening before dark as if it were a fortress, he was bound to place the treasure in the most unlikely spot for a thief to get at it. Now, the coal fire smouldered all night long, and if the gold was in the forge underneath the embers, it would be extremely difficult to get at. A robber rummaging in the dark would burn his fingers in more senses than one. Then, as his lordship kept no less than four loaded revolvers under his pillow, all he had to do, if a thief entered his room was to allow the search to go on until the thief started at the forge, then doubtless, as he had the range with reasonable accuracy night or day, he might sit up in bed and blaze away with revolver after revolver. There were twenty-eight shots that could be fired in about double as many seconds, so you see the robber stood little chance in the face of such a fusillade. I propose that we dismantle the forge."

Lord Chizelrigg was much taken by my reasoning, and one morning early we cut down the big bellows, tore it open, found it empty, then took brick after brick from the forge with a crowbar, for the old man had builded better than he knew with Portland cement. In fact, when we cleared away the rubbish between the bricks and the core of the furnace we came upon one cube of cement which was as hard as granite. With the aid of Higgins, and a set of rollers and levers, we managed to get this block out into the park, and attempted to crush it with the sledge hammers belonging to the forge, in which we were entirely unsuccessful. The more it resisted our efforts, the more certain we became that the coins would be found within it. As this would not be treasure-trove in the sense that the Government might make a claim upon it, there was no particular necessity for secrecy, so we had up a man from the mines near by with drills and dynamite, who speedily shattered the block into a million pieces,

more or less. Alas! there was no trace in its debris of "pay dirt," as the western miner puts it. While the dynamite expert was on the spot, we induced him to shatter the anvil as well as the block of cement, and then the workman, doubtless thinking the new earl was as insane as the old one had been, shouldered his tools, and went back to his mine.

The earl reverted to his former opinion that the gold was concealed in the park, while I held even more firmly to my own belief that the fortune rested in the library.

"It is obvious," I said to him, "that if the treasure is buried outside, some one must have dug the hole. A man so timorous and so reticent as your uncle would allow no one to do this but himself. Higgins maintained the other evening that all picks and spades were safely locked up by himself each night in the tool-house. The mansion itself was barricaded with such exceeding care that it would have been difficult for your uncle to get outside even if he wished to do so. Then such a man as your uncle is described to have been would continually desire ocular demonstration that his savings were intact, which would be practically impossible if the gold had found a grave in the park. I propose now that we abandon violence and dynamite, and proceed to an intellectual search of the library."

"Very well," replied the young earl, "but as I have already searched the library very thoroughly, your use of the word 'intellectual,' Monsieur Valmont, is not in accord with your customary politeness. However, I am with you. 'Tis for you to command, and me to obey."

"Pardon me, my lord!" I said, "I used the word 'intellectual' in contradistinction to the word 'dynamite.' It had no reference to your former search. I merely propose that we now abandon the use of chemical reaction, and employ the much greater force of mental activity. Did you notice any writing on the margins of the newspapers you examined?"

"No, I did not."

"Is it possible that there may have been some communication on the white border of a newspaper?"

"It is, of course, possible."

"Then will you set yourself to the task of glancing over the margin of every newspaper, piling them away in another room when your scrutiny of each is complete? Do not destroy anything, but we must clear out the library completely. I am interested in the accounts, and will examine them."

It was exasperatingly tedious work, but after several days my assistant reported every margin scanned without result, while I had collected each bill and memorandum, classifying them according to date. I could not get rid of a suspicion that the contrary old beast had written instructions for the finding of the treasure on the back of some account, or on the fly-leaf of a book, and as I looked at the thousands of volumes still left in the library, the prospect of such a patient and minute search appalled me. But I remembered Edison's words to the effect that if a thing exists, search, exhaustive enough, will find it. From the mass of accounts I selected several; the rest I placed in another room, alongside the heap of the earl's newspapers.

"Now," said I to my helper, "if it please you, we will have Higgins in, as I wish some explanation of these accounts."

"Perhaps I can assist you," suggested his lordship, drawing up a chair opposite the table on which I had spread the statements. "I have lived here for six months, and know as much about things as Higgins does. He is so difficult to stop when once he begins to talk. What is the first account you wish further to light upon?"

"To go back thirteen years I find that your uncle bought a second-hand safe in Sheffield. Here is the bill. I consider it necessary to find that safe."

"Pray forgive me, Monsieur Valmont," cried the young man, springing to his feet and laughing; "so heavy an article as a safe should not slip readily from a man's memory, but it did from mine. The safe is empty, and I gave no more thought to it."

Saying this the earl went to one of the bookcases that stood against the wall, pulled it round as if it were a door, books and all, and displayed the front of an iron safe, the door of which he also drew open, exhibiting the usual empty interior of such a receptacle.

"I came on this," he said, "when I took down all these volumes. It appears that there was once a secret door leading from the library into an outside room, which has long since disappeared; the walls are very thick. My uncle doubtless caused this door to be taken off its hinges, and the safe placed in the aperture, the rest of which he then bricked up."

"Quite so," said I, endeavouring to conceal my disappointment. "As this strong box was bought second-hand and not made to order, I suppose there can be no secret crannies in it?"

"It looks like a common or garden safe," reported my assistant, "but we'll have it out if you say so."

"Not just now," I replied; "we've had enough of dynamiting to make us feel like housebreakers already."

"I agree with you. What's the next item on the programme?"

"Your uncle's mania for buying things at second-hand was broken in three instances so far as I have been able to learn from a scrutiny of these accounts. About four years ago he purchased a new book from Denny and Co., the well-known booksellers of the Strand. Denny and Co. deal only in new books. Is there any comparatively new volume in the library?"

"Not one."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Oh, quite; I searched all the literature in the house. What is the name of the volume he bought?"

"That I cannot decipher. The initial letter looks like 'M,' but the rest is a mere wavy line. I see, however, that it cost twelve-and-sixpence, while the cost of carriage by parcel post was sixpence, which shows it weighed something under four pounds. This, with the price of the book, induces me to think that it was a scientific work, printed on heavy paper and illustrated."

"I know nothing of it," said the earl.

"The third account is for wall paper; twenty-seven rolls of an expensive wall paper, and twenty-seven rolls of a cheap paper, the latter being just half the price of the former. This wall paper seems to have been supplied by a tradesman in the station road in the village of Chizelrigg."

"There's your wall paper," cried the youth, waving his hand; "he was going to paper the whole house, Higgins told me, but got tired after he had finished the library, which took him nearly a year to accomplish, for he worked at it very intermittently, mixing the paste in the boudoir, a pailful at a time as he needed it. It was a scandalous thing to do, for underneath the paper is the most exquisite oak panelling, very plain, but very rich in colour."

I rose and examined the paper on the wall. It was dark brown, and answered the description of the expensive paper on the bill.

"What became of the cheap paper?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"I think," said I, "we are on the track of the mystery. I believe that paper covers a sliding panel or concealed door."

"It is very likely," replied the earl. "I intended to have the paper off, but I had no money to pay a workman, and I am not so industrious as was my uncle. What is your remaining account?"

"The last also pertains to paper, but comes from a firm in Budge Row, London, E.C. He has had, it seems, a thousand sheets of it, and it appears to have been frightfully expensive. This bill is also illegible, but I take it a thousand sheets were supplied, although of course it may have been a thousand quires, which would be a little more reasonable for the price charged, or a thousand reams, which would be exceedingly cheap."

"I don't know anything about that. Let's turn on Higgins."

Higgins knew nothing of this last order of paper either. The wall paper mystery he at once cleared up. Apparently the old earl had discovered by experiment that the heavy, expensive wall paper would not stick to the glossy panelling, so he had purchased a cheaper paper, and had pasted that on first. Higgins said he had gone all over the panelling with a yellowish-white paper, and after that was dry, he pasted over it the more expensive rolls.

"But," I objected, "the two papers were bought and delivered at the same time; therefore, he could not have found by experiment that the heavy paper would not stick."

"I don't think there is much in that," commented the earl; "the heavy paper may have been bought first, and found to be unsuitable, and then the coarse, cheap paper bought afterwards. The bill merely shows that the account was sent in on that date. Indeed, as the village of Chizelrigg is but a few miles away, it would have been quite possible for my uncle to have bought the heavy paper in the morning, tried it, and in the afternoon sent for the commoner lot; but in any case, the bill would not have been presented until months after the order, and the two purchases were thus lumped together."

I was forced to confess that this seemed reasonable.

Now, about the book ordered from Denny's. Did Higgins remember anything regarding it? It came four years ago.

Ah, yes, Higgins did; he remembered it very well indeed. He had come in one morning with the earl's tea, and the old man was sitting up in bed reading this volume with such interest that he was unaware of Higgins's knock, and Higgins himself, being a little hard of hearing, took for granted the command to enter. The earl hastily thrust the book under the pillow, alongside the revolvers, and rated Higgins in a most cruel way for entering the room before getting permission to do so. He had never seen the

earl so angry before, and he laid it all to this book. It was after the book had come that the forge had been erected and the anvil bought. Higgins never saw the book again, but one morning, six months before the earl died, Higgins, in raking out the cinders of the forge, found what he supposed was a portion of the book's cover. He believed his master had burnt the volume.

Having dismissed Higgins, I said to the earl:

"The first thing to be done is to enclose this bill to Denny and Co., booksellers, Strand. Tell them you have lost the volume, and ask them to send another. There is likely some one in the shop who can decipher the illegible writing. I am certain the book will give us a clue. Now, I shall write to Braun and Sons, Budge Row. This is evidently a French company; in fact, the name as connected with paper-making runs in my mind, although I cannot at this moment place it. I shall ask them the use of this paper that they furnished to the late earl."

This was done accordingly, and now, as we thought, until the answers came, we were two men out of work. Yet the next morning, I am pleased to say, and I have always rather plumed myself on the fact, I solved the mystery before replies were received from London. Of course, both the book and the answer of the paper agents, by putting two and two together, would have given us the key.

After breakfast, I strolled somewhat aimlessly into the library, whose floor was now strewn merely with brown wrapping paper, bits of string, and all that. As I shuffled among this with my feet, as if tossing aside dead autumn leaves in a forest path, my attention was suddenly drawn to several squares of paper, unwrinkled, and never used for wrapping. These sheets seemed to me strangely familiar. I picked one of them up, and at once the significance of the name Braun and Sons occurred to me. They are paper makers in France, who produce a smooth, very tough sheet, which, dear as it is, proves infinitely cheap compared with the fine vellum it deposed in a certain branch of industry. In Paris, years before, these sheets had given me the knowledge of how a gang of thieves disposed of their gold without melting it. The paper was used instead of vellum in the rougher processes of manufacturing gold leaf. It stood the constant beating of the hammer nearly as well as the vellum, and here at once there flashed on me the secret of the old man's midnight anvil work. He was transforming his sovereigns into gold-leaf, which must have been of a rude, thick kind, because to produce the gold-leaf of commerce he still needed the

vellum as well as a "crutch" and other machinery, of which we had found no trace.

"My lord," I called to my assistant; he was at the other end of the room; "I wish to test a theory on the anvil of your own fresh common sense."

"Hammer away," replied the earl, approaching me with his usual good-natured, jocular expression.

"I eliminate the safe from our investigations because it was purchased thirteen years ago, but the buying of the book, of wall covering, of this tough paper from France, all group themselves into a set of incidents occurring within the same month as the purchase of the anvil and the building of the forge; therefore, I think they are related to one another. Here are some sheets of paper he got from Budge Row. Have you ever seen anything like it? Try to tear this sample."

"It's reasonably tough," admitted his lordship, fruitlessly endeavouring to grip it apart.

"Yes. It was made in France, and is used in gold beating. Your uncle beat his sovereigns into gold-leaf. You will find that the book from Denny's is a volume on gold beating, and now as I remember that scribbled word which I could not make out, I think the title of the volume is 'Metallurgy.' It contains, no doubt, a chapter on the manufacture of gold-leaf."

"I believe you," said the earl; "but I don't see that the discovery sets us any further forward. We're now looking for gold-leaf instead of sovereigns."

"Let's examine this wall paper," said I.

I placed my knife under a corner of it at the floor, and quite easily ripped off a large section. As Higgins had said, the brown paper was on top, and the coarse, light-coloured paper underneath. But even that came away from the oak panelling as easily as though it hung there from habit, and not because of paste.

"Feel the weight of that," I cried, handing him the sheet I had torn from the wall.

"By jove!" said the earl, in a voice almost of awe.

I took it from him, and laid it, face downwards, on the wooden table, threw a little water on the back, and with a knife scraped away the porous white paper. Instantly there gleamed up at us the baleful yellow of the gold. I shrugged my shoulders and spread out my hands. The Earl of Chizelrigg laughed aloud and very heartily.

"You see how it is," I cried. "The old man first covered the

entire wall with this whitish paper. He heated his sovereigns at the forge and beat them out on the anvil, then completed the process rudely between the sheets of this paper from France. Probably he pasted the gold to the wall as soon as he shut himself in for the night, and covered it over with the more expensive paper before Higgins entered in the morning."

We found afterwards, however, that he had actually fastened the thick sheets of gold to the wall with carpet tacks.

His lordship netted a trifle over a hundred and twenty-three thousand pounds through my discovery, and I am pleased to pay tribute to the young man's generosity by saying that his voluntary settlement made my bank account swell stout as a City alderman.

E. C. Bentley

THE ORDINARY HAIR-PINS

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A small committee of friends persuaded Lord Aviemore to sit for a presentation portrait, and the painter to whom they gave the commission was Philip Trent. It was a task that fascinated him, for he had often seen and admired in public places the high, half-bald skull, vulture nose, and grim mouth of the peer who was said to be deeper in theology than any other layman, and whose devotion to charitable work had brought him national honour. It was only at the third sitting that Lord Aviemore's sombre taciturnity was laid aside.

"I believe, Mr. Trent," he remarked, abruptly, "that you used to have a portrait of my late sister-in-law here. I was told that it hung in this studio."

Trent continued his work quietly. "It was just a rough drawing I made, after seeing her in 'Carmen' before her marriage. It used to hang here. Before your first visit I removed it."

The sitter nodded slowly. "Very thoughtful of you. Nevertheless, I should much like to see it, if I may."

"Of course." And Trent drew the framed sketch from behind a curtain. Lord Aviemore gazed long in silence at Trent's very

spirited likeness of the famous singer, while the artist worked busily to capture the first expression of feeling that he had so far seen on that impassive face. Lighted and softened by melancholy, it looked for the first time noble.

At last the sitter turned to him. "I would give a good deal," he said, simply, "to possess that drawing."

Trent shook his head. "I don't want to part with it." He laid a few strokes carefully on the canvas and went on: "You would like to know why, I dare say. I will tell you. It is my personal memory of a woman whom I found more admirable than any other I ever saw. Lillemor Wergeland's beauty and physical perfection were a marvel. Her voice was a miracle. Her spirit matched them. I never spoke to her; but everybody in my world talked about her, and many of them knew her."

Lord Aviemore said nothing for a few minutes. Then he spoke slowly. "I do not think you were far wrong about Lady Aviemore. Once I thought differently. When I heard that my elder brother was about to marry a *prima donna,* a woman whose portrait was sold all over the world, who was famous for extravagance in dress and what seemed to me undignified, self-advertising conduct—I was appalled when I heard from him of this engagement. I will not deny that I was also shocked at the idea of a marriage with the daughter of plain Norwegian peasants. She was an orphan of only ten years old when Colonel Stamer and his wife went to lodge at her brother's farm for the fishing. They fell in love with the child, and, having none of their own, they adopted her. All this my brother told me. He knew, he wrote, just what I would think; he only asked me to meet her, and then to judge. Of course, I did so at the first opportunity."

Lord Aviemore paused and stared thoughtfully at the portrait. "She charmed everyone who came near her," he went on presently. "I resisted the spell, but before they had been long married she had vanquished all my prejudice. Her life was all generous impulses and frank enjoyment. But she was not childish. It was not that she was what is called intellectual; but she had a singular spaciousness of mind in which nothing little or mean could live; it had, I used to fancy, some kinship with her Norwegian landscapes of mountain and sea. She was, as you say, extremely beautiful, with the vigorous purity of the fair-haired northern race. All sorts of men were at her feet; but my brother's marriage was the happiest I have ever known."

Trent worked busily upon his canvas, and soon the low, meditative voice resumed.

"It was almost this time six years ago—the middle of March—that I received the terrible news from Taormina. I had just returned from Canada, and I went out there at once. When I saw her she showed no emotion; but there was in her calmness the most unearthly sense of desolation that I have ever perceived. She believed, I found, that she was to blame. You have heard that a slight shock of earthquake caused the villa to collapse, and that my brother and his child were found dead in the ruins; you have heard that Lady Aviemore was sailing in the bay at the time. But you have probably not heard that my brother had a presentiment that their visit to Sicily would end in death, and wished to abandon it; that his wife laughed away his forebodings with her strong modern common sense. But we are of Highland blood and tradition, Mr. Trent, and such interior warnings are no trifles to us. . . . On the tenth day her husband and son were killed. She did not think, as you may suppose, that there was merely coincidence here. The shock changed her whole mental being; she believed then, as I believed, that my brother inwardly foreknew that death awaited him if he went to that place."

He said no more, until Trent remarked, "I know slightly a man called Selby, a solicitor, who was with Lady Aviemore just after her husband's death."

Lord Aviemore said that he remembered Mr. Selby. He said it with such a total absence of expression of any kind that the subject of Selby was killed instantly; and he did not resume that of the tragedy of her whom all the world remembered still as Lillemor Wergeland.

A few months later, when the portrait of Lord Aviemore was to be seen at the show of the N.S.P.P., Trent received a friendly note from Arthur Selby, who asked if Trent would do him the favour of calling at his office by appointment for a private talk. "I should like," he wrote, "to put a certain story before you, a story with a problem in it. I gave it up as a bad job long ago myself; but seeing your portrait of A. at the show reminded me of your reputation as an unraveller."

Thus it happened that, a few days later, Trent was closeted with Selby in one of the rooms of the firm in which that very capable, somewhat dandified, lawyer was a partner. Selby, who never wasted words, came quickly to the point.

"The story I referred to," he said, "is the Aviemore story. I was with her at the time of her suicide. I am an executor of her will. In the strictest confidence, I should like to tell you that story as I know it." He folded his arms upon the broad writing-table between them, and went on: "You know all about the accident. I will start with March 10th, when Lord Aviemore and his son were buried in the cemetery at Taormina. His widow left the villa next day, discharging all the servants except her maid, with whom she went to the Hotel Cavour. There, as I gathered, she seldom left her rooms. She was undoubtedly quite overwhelmed by what had happened, though she seems never to have lost her grip on herself. Her brother-in-law, the present peer, arrived on the 15th. He had only just returned from Canada." Selby raised his finger and repeated, "From Canada, you will remember. He had gone out to get ideas about the emigration prospect, I understood. He remained at the hotel, meaning to accompany her home, when she should feel equal to the journey. It was not until the 18th that we received a long telegram from her, asking if we could send someone representing the firm to her at Taormina; she stated that she wished to discuss business matters, but did not yet feel able to travel. You understand that Lady Aviemore, who already possessed considerable means of her own, came into a large income under her husband's will. She was a client who could afford to indulge her whims.

"I went out to Taormina. On my arrival Lady Aviemore saw me and told me quite calmly that she was acquainted with the provisions of her late husband's will, and that she now wished to make her own. I took her instructions and prepared the will. The next day I and the British Consul witnessed her signature. You may remember, Trent, that when the provisions of that will became public after her death, they attracted a good deal of attention. You don't remember? Well, to put it simply, she left two thousand pounds to her brother, Knut Wergeland, of Myklebostad, in Norway, and fifty to her maid, Maria Krogh, also a Norwegian, who had been with her some years. The whole of the rest of her property she left to her brother-in-law unconditionally. That surprised me, because he had disapproved bitterly of the marriage, and he hadn't concealed his opinion. But she said to me that she could think of nobody who would do so much good with her money as her brother-in-law. From that point of view she was justified. Lord Aviemore is said to spend most of

his income in charitable work. Anyhow, she made him her heir."

"And what did he say to it?"

Selby coughed. "There is no evidence that he knew anything about it before her death. No evidence," he repeated, slowly. "But now let me get on with my story. Lady Aviemore asked me to remain to transact business for her until she should leave Taormina. This she did at last on March 30th, accompanied by Lord Aviemore, myself, and her maid. To shorten the railway journey, as she told us, she planned to go by boat first to Brindisi, then to Venice, and from Venice home by rail. The boats from Brindisi to Venice all go in the day-time, except once a week, when a boat from Corfu arrives in the evening, and goes on about eleven. It happened we could get across from Taormina in time to catch that boat, and Lady Aviemore decided to go by it. We had a few hours in Brindisi, dined there, and about ten o'clock went on board. Lady Aviemore complained of a headache. She went at once to her cabin, which was a deck-cabin, asking me to send someone to collect her ticket at once, as she wanted to sleep as soon as possible, and not to be awakened again. That was done. Shortly before the boat left the maid came to me and told me her mistress was then lying down, and had said she wished to be called at half-past seven in the morning. The maid then went to her own cabin in the second class. Soon after we were out of the harbour I turned in myself. At that time Lord Aviemore was still up. He was leaning over the rail on the promenade deck, upon which Lady Aviemore's cabin opened, and at some distance from the cabin. His own was on the other side of the same deck. I think only two or three other people still remained on the deck, looking out over the sea. It was beginning to blow. I thought we should very likely have some bad weather in an hour or two, and so it turned out. It didn't trouble me, however, and I slept very well.

"It was a quarter to eight when Lord Aviemore woke me by coming into the cabin. He was pale and agitated. He told me that his sister-in-law could not be found, that the maid had gone to her cabin at half-past seven and found it empty!

"I got up in a hurry and went to the cabin. The dressing-case Lady Aviemore had taken with her was there, and her small velvet bag lay on the bed, with her fur coat. Her purse, full of notes and silver, and her jewel-case were on the table, and by them lay a note, folded up, but without address, which you can

see presently. To make a long story short, she had disappeared in the night, and there is not the slightest doubt that she found her grave in the Adriatic. The body was never recovered."

Selby paused, and unlocked a drawer in the table before him. He took out a lady's black velvet bag and a folded sheet of thin ruled paper.

"It was Lord Aviemore," he said, "who found this note in the cabin, and was the first to read it. While I read it, he sat on the cabin-bed with his face in his hands. All through what followed—the official inquiries and so forth—he seemed scarcely awake to what was happening, and I had to do most of the talking. When I had brought him back to London, the firm wrote telling him about the will, which I had not mentioned to him for fear of upsetting him yet more during the journey. Later on, when I saw him about the disposal of Lady Aviemore's personal effects and valuables, I mentioned that there was a handkerchief bag, with a few trifles in it. 'Give it away,' he said. 'Do what you like with it.' Well I kept it," said Selby, with an air of slight embarrassment, "as a sort of memento. And I kept the note too. Here it is."

Selby ceased, and handed the note to Trent. He read these words, written in a large, firm, rounded hand:

> I have loved more, and been more happy, than is good for anyone. And it was through me that they died. Such an ending to such a marriage as ours has been is far worse than death to me. This is not sorrow that I feel; it is destruction, absolute ruin. My soul is quite empty. I have been kept up this month past only by the resolution I took on the day when I lost them, by the thought of what I am going to do now. I take my leave of a world I cannot bear any more.

There followed the initials "L.A." Trent read and re-read the pitiful message, so full of the awful egoism of grief. He asked at length, "Is this her usual handwriting?"

"Except that it seems to have been written with a bad pen it is just like her usual writing. But now listen, Trent. I asked you here today because of your reputation for getting at the truth of things. Soon after the suicide I got an idea into my head, and I have puzzled over these relics of Lady Aviemore a good many times without much result. I did find out a fact or two, though; and it struck me that if I could discover something, you would probably do much better."

Trent, studying the paper, ignored this tribute. "Well," he said, finally, "what is your idea?"

"I'd rather not state it, Trent. But I can tell you a fact or two, as I said. That sheet, as you see, is a sheet torn from an ordinary ruled writing-pad. Now here is a point. I have taken that sheet to a friend of mine who is in the paper business. He has told me that it is a make of paper never sold in Europe at all, but sold a good deal in Canada. Next, Lady Aviemore never was in Canada. And the pad from which the sheet was torn was not in her dressing-case or anywhere in the cabin. Nor was there any pen and ink there, or any fountain-pen. The ink, you see, is a nasty-looking grey ink."

"Continental hotel ink, in fact. She wrote it in the hotel, then, with an hotel pen. But not on hotel paper. Yes, I see," remarked Trent, gazing at the other thoughtfully. "And the other things?" he inquired, suddenly.

"Suggest nothing to me," remarked Selby. "But you have a look at them." He turned the little bag out upon the table. "Here you are—handkerchief, powder-box and puff, mirror, nail-file, hair-pins——"

"Of course," Trent murmured, "hair-pins." He took them in his hand. "Four hair-pins—quite new, I should say. Do they tell a story, Selby?"

"I don't see how. They're just ordinary black hair-pins—as you say, they look too fresh and bright to have been used."

"And that last thing?"

"This is a box of Ixtil, the anti-seasick stuff. Two doses are gone. I believe it's very good."

"I didn't know," Trent remarked, idly, turning the box about, "that you could buy it abroad."

"I was with Lady Aviemore when she bought it at Brindisi, just before going on board."

"Did she buy anything else?"

"I really can't tell you," Selby replied, with a touch of pique. Trent seemed to be asking aimless questions while he stared at the capsules in their tiny box. "She went shopping for an hour or so before dinner, but she was alone, and I didn't see her again until she came down to dinner."

"And so you noticed nothing curious at all," mused Trent, "except this about the paper, and the note having been prepared in advance—which is certainly queer enough. Just cast your mind back beyond the last day. All through the time you were

with them nothing came under your notice that seemed strange in the circumstances?"

Selby fingered his chin. "If you put it like that, I can remember a rather funny thing that I never thought of again until now. But I can't see how it could possibly——"

"Yes, I know. But you asked me here to consider the case in my own way, didn't you?"

"You are so jolly professional, Trent," Selby complained. "It was simply this. Two or three days before we left Taormina I was standing in the hotel office when the mail arrived. As I was waiting to see if there was anything for me, the porter put down on the counter a rather smart-looking package that had just come—done up the way they do it at a really first-class shop, if you know what I mean. It looked like a biggish book, or box of chocolates, or something—about twelve inches by ten, at a guess—and it had French stamps on it, but the postmark I didn't notice. And this, I saw, was addressed to Mlle. Maria Krogh, if you please—Lady Aviemore's Norwegian maid, about the plainest and stodgiest-looking girl in the world, I should say. Well, Maria was there waiting, too, and presently the man handed it to her. She showed no surprise, but went off with it, and just then her mistress came down the big stairs. She saw the parcel and just held out her hand for it as if it was a matter of course; and Maria handed it over in the same way, and the Countess went upstairs with it. But her name wasn't on the parcel, that I'll swear; and Maria hadn't even cut the string. I thought it was quaint, but I forgot it almost at once, because Lady Aviemore decided that evening to leave the place, and I had plenty to attend to. And if you want to know," added Selby, with a hint of irritation, as Trent opened his lips to speak, "where Maria Krogh is, all I can tell you is that I took her ticket for her in London to Christiansand, where her home is, because she was too much upset to do things for herself; and I never thought of her again until we sent her the fifty pounds that was left her, which she acknowledged. Now, then!"

Trent laughed at the solicitor's tone, and Selby laughed also. His friend walked to the fireplace and pensively adjusted his tie. "Well, I must be off," he announced, suddenly. "What do you say to dining with me on Friday? If by that time I've anything to suggest about this thing, I will tell you then. You will? That's splendid." And he hastened away.

But on Friday, Trent seemed to have nothing to suggest. He

was so reluctant to approach the subject that Selby supposed him to be chagrined at his failure to accomplish anything, and did not press the matter.

It was some months later, on a day in September, that Trent walked up the valley road at Myklebostad, looking farewell at the mountain at the end of the valley, the whitecapped father of the torrent that roared down a twenty-foot fall beside him. He had been a week at this most remote backwater of Europe, three hours by steamer from the nearest place that ranked as a town, and with full sixty miles of rugged hills between him and a railway station. The savage beauty of that watery landscape, where sun and rain worked together daily to achieve an unearthly purity in the scene, had justified far better than he had hoped his story that he had come there in search of matter for his brush. He had painted busily while the light lasted, and he had learned in the evenings as much as he could of his neighbours. It was little enough, for the postmaster, in whose cottage he had a room, spoke only an indifferent German; and no one else, so far as he could discover, had anything but Norwegian, of which Trent knew scarcely a dozen traveller's phrases. But he had seen, he thought every man, woman, and child in the valley, and he had closely attended to the household of Knut Wergeland, the rich man of the place, who had the largest farm. He and his wife, both elderly and grim-faced peasants, lived with two servants in an old turf-roofed steading. Not another person, Trent was certain, inhabited the house. They had two sons, he learned, in America.

He had decided at length that his voyage of curiosity to Myklebostad had been ill-inspired. Knut and his wife were no more than a thrifty peasant pair. They had given him a meal at their house one day when he was sketching near the place, and they had refused with gentle firmness to take any payment. Both produced upon him an impression of illimitable trustworthiness and competency in the life they led so utterly out of the world.

That day, as Trent gazed up to the mountain, his eye was caught by a flash of the sunlight against the dense growth of birches that ran from bottom to top of the precipitous height that was the valley wall to his left.

It was a bright blink, about half a mile from where he stood; it remained steady, and at several points above and below he saw the same bright appearance. Considering it, he perceived

that there must be a wire somehow led up the steep hill-face, among the trees. A merely idle curiosity drew his steps towards the spot on the road whence the wire seemed to be taken upwards. In a few minutes he came to the opening among the trees of a rough track leading upwards among rocks and roots, at such an angle that only a vigorous climber could attempt it. Close by, in the edge of the thicket, stood a tall post, from the top of which a bright wire stretched upwards through the branches in the same direction as the path.

Trent slapped the post with a sounding blow.

"Heavens and earth!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten the sæter!"

At once he began to climb.

A thicket carpet of rich pasture began where the deep birch-belt ended at the top of the height. It stretched away for miles over a gently-sloping upland. As Trent came into the open, panting, after a strenuous forty-minute climb, the heads of a few browsing cattle were sleepily turned towards him. Beyond them wandered many more, and a hundred yards away stood a tiny wooden hut, turf-roofed. This plateau was the sæter, a thing of which Trent had read in some guide-book, and never thought since; the high grass-land attached to some valley farm. The wire he had seen was stretched from bottom to top, the fall being very steep, so that the bales of the hay-crop could be slid down to the valley without carrying. At the summer's end, cows were led by an easier détour to the uplands, there to remain grazing for six weeks or more, attended by some robust peasant-woman who lived solitary with the herd.

And there, at the side of the hut, bending over a rough table, a woman stood. Trent, as he slowly approached, noted her short, rough skirt and coarse, sack-like upper garment, her thick grey stockings and clumsy clogs. About her bare head her pale gold hair was fastened in tight plaits. As she looked up on hearing Trent's footfall, two heavy silver ear-rings dangled about the tanned and toil-worn face of this very type of the middle-aged peasant-woman of the region.

She ceased her task of scraping a large cake of chocolate into a bowl, and straightened her tall body; smiling, with her lean hands on her hips, she spoke in Norwegian, greeting him.

Trent made the proper reply. "And that," he added, in Eng-

lish, "is almost all of the language I know. Perhaps, madam, you speak English?"

Her light blue eyes looked puzzlement, and she spoke again in Norwegian, pointing downward to the valley. He nodded, and she began to talk pleasantly in her unknown tongue. From within the hut she brought two thick mugs; she pointed rapidly to the chocolate in the bowl, to himself and herself, then downward again to the village.

"I should like it of all things," he said; "you are most kind and hospitable, like all your people. What a pity it is we have no language in common!" She brought him a stool and gave him the chocolate cake and a knife, making signs that he should continue the scraping; then within the hut she kindled a fire of twigs, and began to boil water in a black pot. Plainly it was her dwelling, the roughest Trent had ever seen. On two small shelves against the rough planks of the wall were ranged a few pieces of earthenware, coarse and chipped, but clean. A wooden bed-place, with straw and two neatly-folded blankets, filled a third of the space of the hut. All the carpentering was of the rudest. From a small chest in a corner she drew a biscuit-tin, half-full of flat cakes of stale bread. There seemed to be nothing else in the tiny place save a heap of twigs for firing.

She made chocolate in the two mugs, and then, on Trent's insistence, sat upon the only stool at the little table outside the hut, while he made a seat of an upturned milk-pail. She continued to talk amiably, while he finished with difficulty one of the bread-cakes.

"I believe," he said, at last, setting down his empty mug, "you are talking merely to hear the sound of your own voice, madam. It is excusable in you. You don't understand English, so I will tell you to your face it is a most beautiful voice. I should say," he went on, thoughtfully, "that you ought, with training, to have been one of the greatest soprano singers who ever lived."

She heard him calmly, and shook her head, as not understanding.

"Well, don't say I didn't break it gently," Trent protested. He rose to his feet. "Madam, I know that you are Lady Aviemore. I have broken in upon your solitude, and I ask your pardon for that; but I could not be sure unless I saw you. I give you my word that no one knows, and no one shall know from me, what I know."

He made as if to return by the way he came. But the woman held up her hand. A singular change had come over her brown face. An open and lively spirit now looked out of her desolate blue eyes, and she smiled another and much more intelligent smile. After a few minutes she spoke in English, fluent but quaintly pronounced. "Sir," she said, "you have behaved very nicely up till now. It has been amusing for me; there is not much comedy on the sæter. Now will you have the goodness to explain?"

He told her in a few words that he had suspected she was still alive; that he had thought over the facts which had come to his knowledge; and that he had been led to think she was probably in that place. "I thought you might guess that I had recognised you," he added. "So it seemed best to assure you that your secret was safe. Was it wrong to speak?"

She shook her head, gazing at him with her chin on her hand. Presently she said, "I think you are not against me. But I do not understand why you kept my secret from others when you had found it out."

"I sought for it because I am curious," he answered. "I kept it, and I will always keep it, because—oh, well! because to me Lillemor Wergeland is a sort of divinity."

She laughed suddenly. "Incense! And I in these rags, in this place, with what I can see in this little spotty piece of cheap looking-glass! Ah, well! You have come a long way, Monsieur le Curieux, and it would be a cruelty not to confide in you. After all, it was simple.

"It was only a day or two after the disaster that the resolve came to me. I never hesitated a moment. It was through me that they were in that place—you have heard that? I felt I must leave the world I knew, and that knew me. Suicide never occurred to me—what is there more contemptible? As for a convent, unhappily there is none for people with minds like mine. I meant simply to disappear, and the only way to succeed was to get the reputation of being dead. I thought it out for some days and nights. Then I wrote, in the name of my maid, to an establishment in Paris where I used to buy things for the stage. I sent money, and ordered a dark brown transformation—that is a lady's word for a wig—some stuff for darkening the skin, various pigments and pencils, et tout le bazar. My maid did not know what I had sent for; she only handed the parcel to me when it arrived. She would have thrown herself in the fire for me,

I think, my maid Maria. The day the things came I announced that I would return home by the route you know."

"Then it was as I guessed!" Trent exclaimed. "You disguised yourself on the steamer at Brindisi, and slipped off in the dark before it started."

"I was no such imbecile, indeed," returned the lady, with a hint of sharpness. "How if my absence had been discovered somehow before the starting? That could happen; and then what? No; when we reached Brindisi from Taormina, I knew we had some hours there. I put on a thick veil and went out alone. At the office by the harbour I took a second-class berth for myself, Miss Julia Simms, travelling from Brindisi to Venice. I found the boat was already alongside the quay. Then I went into the poorer streets of the town and bought some clothes, very ugly ones, some shoes, some cheap toilet things——"

"Some black hair-pins," murmured Trent.

"Naturally, black," she assented. She looked at him inquiringly, then resumed. "I bought also a melancholy little cheap portmanteau-thing, and put my purchases in it. I took it on a cab to the harbour, and gave one of the ship's stewards a lira to put it in Miss Simms's cabin to await her. After that I bought two other things, a long mackintosh coat and a funny little cap, the very things for Miss Simms, and at the hotel I pushed them under the things my maid had already packed in my dressing-case. On the steamer, when I was locked in my cabin without danger of disturbance, I took off my fur coat, I arranged a dark, rather catty sort of face for myself, and fitted on Miss Simms's hair. I put on her mackintosh and cap. When the boat began to move away from the quay, and people on deck were looking over the rail, I just stepped out of my cabin, shut the door, and walked straight to Miss Simms's berth at the other end of the ship. There is not much more to say. When we reached Venice I did not look for the others, and I never saw them. I went straight on to Paris, and wrote to my brother Knut that I was alive, and told him just what I meant to do if he would help me. Such things do not seem so mad to a true child of Norway."

"What things?" Trent asked.

"Things of deep sorrow, malady of soul, escape from the world. He and his wife have been true and good to me. I am supposed to be her cousin, Hilda Bjornstad. I left them money, more than enough to pay for me, but they did not know that when they welcomed me here."

She ceased, and smiled vaguely at Trent, who was considering her tale with eyes that gazed fixedly at the sky-line. "Yes, of course," he remarked, presently, in an abstracted manner. "That was it. So simple! And now may I tell you," he went on, with a sudden change of tone, "one or two details you have forgotten?

"At Brindisi you bought, just before going on the boat, a box of the stuff called Ixtil, to prevent sea-sickness. You took a dose before going on board and another just after, as the directions prescribed. Then, as Mr. Selby happened to know you had it, you thought it best to leave it behind when you vanished. Also you left behind you, in your hurry, four black hair-pins, quite new, which had somehow, I suppose, got loose inside your little bag, and which were found there by Selby. You see, Lady Aviemore, it was Selby who brought me into this. He told me all the facts he knew. And he showed me the velvet bag and its contents. But he did not attach any importance to the two things I have just mentioned."

Lady Aviemore raised her eyebrows perceptibly. "I cannot see why he should. And I cannot see why he should bring in anybody."

"Because he had some vague idea of your brother-in-law having caused your death, or, at any rate, having known your intention to commit suicide. He never said it outright, but it was plain that that was in his mind. You see, Lord Aviemore stood to benefit enormously by your death; and then there was the matter of your note announcing your suicide."

"It announced," she remarked, "the truth: that I was leaving a world I could not bear. The words might mean one thing or another. But what of the note?"

"That truthful note," said Trent, "was written with pen and ink, of which there was none in your cabin. It was written on paper which had been torn from a block, and no block was found. Also it was discovered that that particular make of paper is sold in Canada, but has never been sold in Europe. You had never been in Canada. Lord Aviemore had just come back from Canada. You see?"

"But did not Mr. Selby perceive that my brother-in-law is a saint?" inquired the lady, with a touch of impatience. "Surely that was plain! An evident saint!"

"In my slight knowledge of him," admitted Trent, "he struck me in that way. But Selby is a lawyer, and lawyers don't under-

stand saints. Besides, Lord Aviemore disliked him, I fancy, and perhaps he felt the same way about Lord Aviemore."

"It is true he did not approve of Mr. Selby, because he disliked all men who were smart and worldly. But now I will tell you. That evening in the hotel at Brindisi I wanted to write the note, and I asked my brother-in-law for a sheet from a block he had in his hand and was about to write upon. That is all. I wrote it in the hotel writing-room, and took it afterwards in my bag to the cabin."

"We supposed you had written it beforehand," Trent observed, "and that was one of the things that led me to feel morally certain that you were still alive. I'll explain. If, as we thought, you had written the note in the hotel, your suicide was a premeditated act. Yet Selby afterwards saw you buying that medicine, and it was plain that you had taken two doses. Now, it struck me that it was ridiculous for anyone already determined on drowning herself at sea to begin treating herself against seasickness. Then there were those new black hair-pins. The sight of them was a revelation to me. They meant disguise. For I knew, of course, that with that hair you had probably never used a dark hair-pin in your life."

The Countess felt at her pale-gold plaits, and gravely extended a black hair-pin. "In the valley we all use them."

"It is very different in the valley, I know," he said, quietly.

The lady regarded her guest with something of respect.

"It still remains," she said, "to explain how you knew it was in Norway, and here, as a poor farm-servant, that I should hide myself. It seemed to me the last thing in the world—your world—that a woman who had lived my life would be expected to do."

"There was no certainty about it," he answered. "It was a strong possibility, that's all. Your problem, you see, was just what you say—to hide yourself. And you had another, I think. You had to get your living somehow. Everything you possessed—except some small sum in cash, I suppose—you left behind you when you disappeared. Now, a woman cannot very well go on acting and disguising herself for ever. A man can grow hair on his face or shave it off; for a woman, disguise must be a perpetual anxiety. If she has to get employment, and especially if she has no references, it's an impossibility."

She nodded gravely. "That was how I saw it."

"So," he pursued, "it came to this: that Lillemor Wergeland had to come to the surface again somewhere, and in no long

time; Lillemor Wergeland, whose type of beauty and general appearance were so marked and unmistakable, and whose photograph had gone all over the world. The fact is that for some time I didn't see how it could possibly have been done. There were only a few countries, I supposed, of which you knew enough of the language to make any attempt to live and work in them. In those countries you would always attract attention by your physical type and your accent; and if you attracted attention, discovery might follow at any moment. The more I thought of it the more difficult it seemed.

"And then the idea came. There was one country in which your looks and speech would not betray you as a foreigner—your own country. And among those corners of the world where Lillemor Wergeland could go with a fair certainty of being unrecognised, the remoter villages of Norway would be. And at Myklebostad, on the Langfjord, which the map told me was thirty miles from the nearest town and sixty from the nearest railway, Lillemor Wergeland had a brother, who was also the richer by two thousand pounds for her supposed death.

"You see, then, how I formed the theory which brought me to this place on a sketching holiday." Trent stood up and gazed across the valley to the sunlit white peaks beyond. "I have visited Norway before, but I have never had such an interesting time. And now, before I return to the haunts of men, let me say again that I shall forget at once all that has happened to-day. Don't think it was a vulgar curiosity that brought me here. There was once a supreme artiste called Lillemore Wergeland, whose gifts made me her debtor and servant. Anything that happened to her touched me; I had a sort of right to go seeking what it really was that had happened."

She stood before him in her coarse and stained clothes, her hands clasped behind her, with a face and attitude of perfect dignity.

"Very well. You stand on your right, and I on mine—to arrange my own life, since I am alone in it. And I will spend it here, where it began. My soul was born here, before it went out to have adventures, and it has crept home again for comfort. Believe me, it is not only as you say, that I am safe from discovery here. That counts very much; but it is the truth that I felt I must go out of the world, and live out my life where it began, in this far-away, lonely place, where everything is humble, and there is no wealth or luxury at all, and the hills and the

fjords are severe and grand, just as God made them before there were any men. Some people used to have that impulse, you know, long ago, when something had happened to make them tired of the world, or to stain their souls so that they must go apart and wash their wickedness away. And this, all this is my own, own land! And now," she ended, suddenly, "we understand one another."

She extended her hand, saying, "I do not know your name."

"Why should you?" he asked, bending over it; then went quickly from her. At the beginning of the descent he glanced back once; she waved her hand with a quick gesture.

Half-way down the rugged climb Trent stopped. Far above a wonderful voice was singing to the glory of the Norse land, whose mountains (it sang) not even the storm that should rive the globe itself would be able to shake.

"Ja! Herligt er mit Fodeland,
Der ewig trodser Tidens Tand,"

sang the voice.

Trent looked out upon the wild landscape.

"Her Fatherland!" he soliloquised. "Well, well! They say the strictest parents have the most devoted children."

Anthony Berkeley

THE AVENGING CHANCE

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Roger Sheringham was inclined to think afterwards that the Poisoned Chocolates Case, as the papers called it, was perhaps the most perfectly planned murder he had ever encountered. The motive was so obvious, when you knew where to look for it—but you didn't know; the method was so significant when you had grasped its real essentials—but you didn't grasp them; the traces were so thinly covered, when you had realised what was covering them—but you didn't realise. But for a piece of the merest bad luck, which the murderer could not possibly have foreseen, the crime must have been added to the classical list of great mysteries.

This is the gist of the case, as Chief-Inspector Moresby told it one evening to Roger in the latter's rooms in the Albany a week or so after it happened:

On Friday morning, the fifteenth of November, at half-past ten in the morning, in accordance with his invariable custom, Sir William Anstruther walked into his club in Piccadilly, the very exclusive Rainbow Club, and asked for his letters. The porter handed him three and a small parcel. Sir William walked over to the fireplace in the big lounge hall to open them.

A few minutes later another member entered the club, a Mr. Graham Beresford. There were a letter and a couple of circulars for him, and he also strolled over to the fireplace, nodding to Sir William, but not speaking to him. The two men only knew each other very slightly, and had probably never exchanged more than a dozen words in all.

Having glanced through his letters, Sir William opened the parcel and, after a moment, snorted with disgust. Beresford looked at him, and with a grunt Sir William thrust out a letter which had been enclosed in the parcel. Concealing a smile (Sir William's ways were a matter of some amusement to his fellow-members), Beresford read the letter. It was from a big firm of chocolate manufacturers, Mason & Sons, and set forth that they were putting on the market a new brand of liqueur-chocolates designed especially to appeal to men; would Sir William do them the honour of accepting the enclosed two-pound box and letting the firm have his candid opinion on them?

"Do they think I'm a blank chorus-girl?" fumed Sir William. "Write 'em testimonials about their blank chocolates, indeed! Blank 'em! I'll complain to the blank committee. That sort of blank thing can't blank well be allowed here."

"Well, it's an ill wind so far as I'm concerned," Beresford soothed him. "It's reminded me of something. My wife and I had a box at the Imperial last night. I bet her a box of chocolates to a hundred cigarettes that she wouldn't spot the villain by the end of the second act. She won. I must remember to get them. Have you seen it—*The Creaking Skull*? Not a bad show."

Sir William had not seen it, and said so with force.

"Want a box of chocolates, did you say?" he added, more mildly. "Well, take this blank one. I don't want it."

For a moment Beresford demurred politely and then, most unfortunately for himself, accepted. The money so saved meant

nothing to him for he was a wealthy man; but trouble was always worth saving.

By an extraordinarily lucky chance neither the outer wrapper of the box nor its covering letter were thrown into the fire, and this was the more fortunate in that both men had tossed the envelopes of their letters into the flames. Sir William did, indeed, make a bundle of the wrapper, letter and string, but he handed it over to Beresford, and the latter simply dropped it inside the fender. This bundle the porter subsequently extracted and, being a man of orderly habits, put it tidily away in the waste-paper basket, whence it was retrieved later by the police.

Of the three unconscious protagonists in the impending tragedy, Sir William was without doubt the most remarkable. Still a year or two under fifty, he looked, with his flaming red face and thick-set figure, a typical country squire of the old school, and both his manners and his language were in accordance with tradition. His habits, especially as regards women, were also in accordance with tradition—the tradition of the bold, bad baronet which he undoubtedly was.

In comparison with him, Beresford was rather an ordinary man, a tall, dark, not unhandsome fellow of two-and-thirty, quiet and reserved. His father had left him a rich man, but idleness did not appeal to him, and he had a finger in a good many business pies.

Money attracts money. Graham Beresford had inherited it, he made it, and, inevitably, he had married it, too. The daughter of a late shipowner in Liverpool, with not far off half a million in her own right. But the money was incidental, for he needed her and would have married her just as inevitably (said his friends) if she had not had a farthing. A tall, rather serious-minded, highly cultured girl, not so young that her character had not had time to form (she was twenty-five when Beresford married her, three years ago), she was the ideal wife for him. A bit of a Puritan perhaps in some ways, but Beresford, whose wild oats, though duly sown, had been a sparse crop, was ready enough to be a Puritan himself by that time if she was. To make no bones about it, the Beresfords succeeded in achieving that eighth wonder of the modern world, a happy marriage.

And into the middle of it there dropped with irretrievable tragedy, the box of chocolates.

Beresford gave them to her after lunch as they sat over their coffee, with some jesting remark about paying his honourable debts, and she opened the box at once. The top layer, she noticed,

seemed to consist only of kirsch and maraschino. Beresford, who did not believe in spoiling good coffee, refused when she offered him the box, and his wife ate the first one alone. As she did so she exclaimed in surprise that the filling seemed exceedingly strong and positively burnt her mouth.

Beresford explained that they were samples of a new brand and then, made curious by what his wife had said, took one too. A burning taste, not intolerable but much too strong to be pleasant, followed the release of the liquid, and the almond flavouring seemed quite excessive.

"By jove," he said, "they are strong. They must be filled with neat alcohol."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that, surely," said his wife, taking another. "But they are very strong. I think I rather like them, though."

Beresford ate another, and disliked it still more. "I don't," he said with decision. "They make my tongue feel quite numb. I shouldn't eat any more of them if I were you. I think there's something wrong with them."

"Well, they're only an experiment, I suppose," she said. "But they do burn. I'm not sure whether I like them or not."

A few minutes later Beresford went out to keep a business appointment in the City. He left her still trying to make up her mind whether she liked them, and still eating them to decide. Beresford remembered that scrap of conversation afterwards very vividly, because it was the last time he saw his wife alive.

That was roughly half-past two. At a quarter to four Beresford arrived at his club from the City in a taxi, in a state of collapse. He was helped into the building by the driver and the porter, and both described him subsequently as pale to the point of ghastliness, with staring eyes and livid lips, and his skin damp and clammy. His mind seemed unaffected, however, and when they had got him up the steps he was able to walk, with the porter's help, into the lounge.

The porter, thoroughly alarmed, wanted to send for a doctor at once, but Beresford, who was the last man in the world to make a fuss, refused to let him, saying that it must be indigestion and he would be all right in a few minutes. To Sir William Anstruther, however, who was in the lounge at the time, he added after the porter had gone:

"Yes, and I believe it was those infernal chocolates you gave me, now I come to think of it. I thought there was something

funny about them at the time. I'd better go and find out if my wife——" He broke off abruptly. His body, which had been leaning back limply in his chair, suddenly heaved rigidly upright; his jaws locked together, the livid lips drawn back in a horrible grin, and his hands clenched on the arms of his chair. At the same time Sir William became aware of an unmistakable smell of bitter almonds.

Thoroughly alarmed, believing indeed that the man was dying under his eyes, Sir William raised a shout for the porter and a doctor. The other occupants of the lounge hurried up, and between them they got the convulsed body of the unconscious man into a more comfortable position. Before the doctor could arrive a telephone message was received at the club from an agitated butler asking if Mr. Beresford was there, and if so would he come home at once as Mrs. Beresford had been taken seriously ill. As a matter of fact she was already dead.

Beresford did not die. He had taken less of the poison than his wife, who after his departure must have eaten at least three more of the chocolates, so that its action was less rapid and the doctor had time to save him. As a matter of fact it turned out afterwards that he had not had a fatal dose. By about eight o'clock that night he was conscious; the next day he was practically convalescent.

As for the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford, the doctor had arrived too late to save her, and she passed away very rapidly in a deep coma.

The police had taken the matter in hand as soon as Mrs. Beresford's death was reported to them and the fact of poison established, and it was only a very short time before things had become narrowed down to the chocolates as the active agent.

Sir William was interrogated, the letter and wrapper were recovered from the waste-paper basket, and, even before the sick man was out of danger, a detective-inspector was asking for an interview with the managing-director of Mason & Sons. Scotland Yard moves quickly.

It was the police theory at this stage, based on what Sir William and the two doctors had been able to tell them, that by an act of criminal carelessness on the part of one of Mason's employees, an excessive amount of oil of bitter almonds had been included in the filling mixture of the chocolates, for that was what the doctor had decided must be the poisoning ingredient. However, the managing-director quashed this idea at once: oil of bitter almonds, he asserted, was never used by Mason's.

He had more interesting news still. Having read with undisguised astonishment the covering letter, he at once declared that it was a forgery. No such letter, no such samples had been sent out by the firm at all; a new variety of liqueur-chocolates had never even been mooted. The fatal chocolates were their ordinary brand.

Unwrapping and examining one more closely, he called the Inspector's attention to a mark on the underside, which he suggested was the remains of a small hole drilled in the case, through which the liquid could have been extracted and the fatal filling inserted, the hole afterwards being stopped up with softened chocolate, a perfectly simple operation.

He examined it under a magnifying-glass and the Inspector agreed. It was now clear to him that somebody had been trying deliberately to murder Sir William Anstruther.

Scotland Yard doubled its activities. The chocolates were sent for analysis, Sir William was interviewed again, and so was the now conscious Beresford. From the latter the doctor insisted that the news of his wife's death must be kept till the next day, as in his weakened condition the shock might be fatal, so that nothing very helpful was obtained from him.

Nor could Sir William throw any light on the mystery or produce a single person who might have any grounds for trying to kill him. He was living apart from his wife, who was the principal beneficiary in his will, but she was in the South of France, as the French police subsequently confirmed. His estate in Worcestershire, heavily mortgaged, was entailed and went to a nephew; but as the rent he got for it barely covered the interest on the mortgage, and the nephew was considerably better off than Sir William himself, there was no motive there. The police were at a dead end.

The analysis brought one or two interesting facts to light. Not oil of bitter almonds but nitrobenzine, a kindred substance, chiefly used in the manufacture of aniline dyes, was the somewhat surprising poison employed. Each chocolate in the upper layer contained exactly six minims of it, in a mixture of kirsch and maraschino. The chocolates in the other layers were harmless.

As to the other clues, they seemed equally useless. The sheet of Mason's note paper was identified by Merton's, the printers, as of their work, but there was nothing to show how it had got into the murderer's possession. All that could be said was that, the edges being distinctly yellowed, it must be an old piece. The machine on which the letter had been typed, of course, could not be traced.

From the wrapper, a piece of ordinary brown paper with Sir William's address hand-printed on it in large capitals, there was nothing to be learnt at all beyond that the parcel had been posted at the office in Southampton Street between the hours of 8.30 and 9.30 on the previous evening.

Only one thing was quite clear. Whoever had coveted Sir William's life had no intention of paying for it with his or her own.

"And now you know as much as we do, Mr. Sheringham," concluded Chief-Inspector Moresby; "and if you can say who sent those chocolates to Sir William, you'll know a good deal more."

Roger nodded thoughtfully.

"It's a brute of a case. I met a man only yesterday who was at school with Beresford. He didn't know him very well because Beresford was on the modern side and my friend was a classical bird, but they were in the same house. He says Beresford's absolutely knocked over by his wife's death. I wish you could find out who sent those chocolates, Moresby."

"So do I, Mr. Sheringham," said Moresby gloomily.

"It might have been anyone in the whole world," Roger mused. "What about feminine jealousy, for instance? Sir William's private life doesn't seem to be immaculate. I dare say there's a good deal of off with the old light-o'-love and on with the new."

"Why, that's just what I've been looking into, Mr. Sheringham, sir," retorted Chief-Inspector Moresby reproachfully. "That was the first thing that came to me. Because if anything does stand out about this business it is that it's a woman's crime. Nobody but a woman would send poisoned chocolates to a man. Another man would send a poisoned sample of whisky, or something like that."

"That's a very sound point, Moresby," Roger meditated. "Very sound indeed. And Sir William couldn't help you?"

"Couldn't," said Moresby, not without a trace of resentment, "or wouldn't. I was inclined to believe at first that he might have his suspicions and was shielding some woman. But I don't think so now."

"Humph!" Roger did not seem quite so sure. "It's reminiscent, this case, isn't it? Didn't some lunatic once send poisoned chocolates to the Commissioner of Police himself? A good crime always gets imitated, as you know."

Moresby brightened.

"It's funny you should say that, Mr. Sheringham, because that's the very conclusion I've come to. I've tested every other theory, and so far as I know there's not a soul with an interest in Sir William's death, whether from motives of gain, revenge, or what you like, whom I haven't had to rule quite out of it. In fact, I've pretty well made up my mind that the person who sent those chocolates was some irresponsible lunatic of a woman, a social or religious fanatic who's probably never even seen him. And if that's the case," Moresby sighed, "a fat chance I have of ever laying hands on her."

"Unless Chance steps in, as it so often does," said Roger brightly, "and helps you. A tremendous lot of cases get solved by a stroke of sheer luck, don't they? *Chance the Avenger.* It would make an excellent film-title. But there's a lot of truth in it. If I were superstitious, which I'm not, I should say it wasn't chance at all, but Providence avenging the victim."

"Well, Mr. Sheringham," said Moresby, who was not superstitious either, "to tell the truth, I don't mind what it is, so long as it lets me get my hands on the right person."

If Moresby had paid his visit to Roger Sheringham with any hope of tapping that gentleman's brains, he went away disappointed.

To tell the truth, Roger was inclined to agree with the Chief Inspector's conclusion, that the attempt on the life of Sir William Anstruther and the actual murder of the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford must be the work of some unknown criminal lunatic. For this reason, although he thought about it a good deal during the next few days, he made no attempt to take the case in hand. It was the sort of affair, necessitating endless inquiries that a private person would have neither the time nor the authority to carry out, which can be handled only by the official police. Roger's interest in it was purely academic.

It was hazard, a chance encounter nearly a week later, which translated this interest from the academic into the personal.

Roger was in Bond Street, about to go through the distressing ordeal of buying a new hat. Along the pavement he suddenly saw bearing down on him Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming. Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was small, exquisite, rich, and a widow, and she sat at Roger's feet whenever he gave her the opportunity. But she talked. She talked, in fact, and talked, and talked. And Roger, who rather liked talking himself, could not bear it. He

tried to dart across the road, but there was no opening in the traffic stream. He was cornered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming fastened on him gladly.

"Oh, Mr. Sheringham! *Just* the person I wanted to see. Mr. Sheringham, *do* tell me. In confidence. *Are* you taking up this dreadful business of poor Joan Beresford's death?"

Roger, the frozen and imbecile grin of civilised intercourse on his face, tried to get a word in; without result.

"I was horrified when I heard of it—simply horrified. You see, Joan and I were such *very* close friends. Quite intimate. And the awful thing, the truly *terrible* thing is that Joan brought the whole business on herself. Isn't that *appalling*?"

Roger no longer wanted to escape.

"What did you say?" he managed to insert incredulously.

"I suppose it's what they call tragic irony," Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming chattered on. "Certainly it was tragic enough, and I've never heard anything so terribly ironical. You know about that bet she made with her husband, of course, so that he had to get her a box of chocolates, and if he hadn't Sir William would never have given him the poisoned ones and he'd have eaten them and died himself and good riddance? Well, Mr. Sheringham——" Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming lowered her voice to a conspirator's whisper and glanced about her in the approved manner. "I've never told anybody else this, but I'm telling you because I know you'll appreciate it. *Joan wasn't playing fair*!"

"How do you mean?" Roger asked, bewildered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was artlessly pleased with her sensation.

"Why, she'd seen the play before. We went together, the very first week it was on. She *knew* who the villain was all the time."

"By Jove!" Roger was as impressed as Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming could have wished. "Chance the Avenger! We're none of us immune from it."

"Poetic justice, you mean?" twittered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, to whom these remarks had been somewhat obscure. "Yes, but Joan Beresford of all people! That's the extraordinary thing. I should never had thought Joan *would* do a thing like that. She was such a *nice* girl. A little close with money, of course, considering how well-off they are, but that isn't anything. Of course it was only fun, and pulling her husband's leg, but I always used to think Joan was such a *serious girl,* Mr. Sheringham. I

mean, ordinary people don't talk about honour, and truth, and playing the game, and all those things one takes for granted. But Joan did. She was always saying that this wasn't honourable, or that wouldn't be playing the game. Well, she paid herself for not playing the game, poor girl, didn't she? Still, it all goes to show the truth of the old saying, doesn't it?"

"What old saying?" said Roger, hypnotised by this flow.

"Why, that still waters run deep. Joan must have been deep, I'm afraid." Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming sighed. It was evidently a social error to be deep. "I mean, she certainly took me in. She can't have been quite so honourable and truthful as she was always pretending, can she? And I can't help wondering whether a girl who'd deceive her husband in a little thing like that might not—oh, well, I don't want to say anything against poor Joan now she's dead, poor darling, but she can't have been *quite* such a plaster saint after all, can she? I mean," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, in hasty extenuation of these suggestions, "I do think psychology is so very interesting, don't you, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Sometimes, very," Roger agreed gravely. "But you mentioned Sir William Anstruther just now. Do you know him, too?"

"I used to," Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming replied, without particular interest. "Horrible man! Always running after some woman or other. And when he's tired of her, just drops her—biff!—like that. At least," added Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming somewhat hastily, "so I've heard."

"And what happens if she refuses to be dropped?"

"Oh dear, I'm sure I don't know. I suppose you've heard the latest?"

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming hurried on, perhaps a trifle more pink than the delicate aids to nature on her cheeks would have warranted.

"He's taken up with that Bryce woman now. You know, the wife of the oil man, or petrol, or whatever he made his money in. It began about three weeks ago. You'd have thought that dreadful business of being responsible, in a way, for poor Joan Beresford's death would have sobered him up a little, wouldn't you? But not a bit of it; he——"

Roger was following another line of thought.

"What a pity you weren't at the Imperial with the Beresfords that evening. She'd never have made that bet if you had been." Roger looked extremely innocent. "You weren't, I suppose?"

"I?" queried Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming in surprise. "Good

gracious, no. I was at the new revue at the Pavilion. Lady Gavelstoke had a box and asked me to join her party."

"Oh, yes. Good show, isn't it? I thought that sketch *The Sempiternal Triangle* very clever. Didn't you?"

"The Sempiternal Triangle?" wavered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming.

"Yes in the first half."

"Oh! Then I didn't see it. I got there disgracefully late, I'm afraid. But then," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming with pathos, "I always do seem to be late for simply everything."

Roger kept the rest of the conversation resolutely upon theatres. But before he left her he had ascertained that she had photographs of both Mrs. Beresford and Sir William Anstruther, and had obtained permission to borrow them some time. As soon as she was out of view he hailed a taxi and gave Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's address. He thought it better to take advantage of her permission at a time when he would not have to pay for it a second time over.

The parlourmaid seemed to think there was nothing odd in his mission, and took him up to the drawing-room at once. A corner of the room was devoted to the silver-framed photographs of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's friends, and there were many of them. Roger examined them with interest, and finally took away with him not two photographs but six, those of Sir William, Mrs. Beresford, Beresford, two strange males who appeared to belong to the Sir William period, and, lastly, a likeness of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming herself. Roger liked confusing his trail.

For the rest of the day he was very busy.

His activities would have no doubt seemed to Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming not merely baffling but pointless. He paid a visit to a public library, for instance, and consulted a work of reference, after which he took a taxi and drove to the offices of the Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company, where he inquired for a certain Mr. Joseph Lea Hardwick and seemed much put out on hearing that no such gentleman was known to the firm and was certainly not employed in any of their branches. Many questions had to be put about the firm and its branches before he consented to abandon the quest.

After that he drove to Messrs. Weall and Wilson, the well-known institution which protects the trade interests of individuals and advises its subscribers regarding investments. Here he entered his name as a subscriber, and explaining that he had a large sum

of money to invest, filled in one of the special enquiry-forms which are headed Strictly Confidential.

Then he went to the Rainbow Club, in Piccadilly.

Introducing himself to the porter without a blush as connected with Scotland Yard, he asked the man a number of questions, more or less trivial, concerning the tragedy.

"Sir William, I understand," he said finally, as if by the way, "did not dine here the evening before?"

There it appeared that Roger was wrong. Sir William had dined in the club, as he did about three times a week.

"But I quite understood he wasn't here that evening?" Roger said plaintively.

The porter was emphatic. He remembered quite well. So did a waiter, whom the porter summoned to corroborate him. Sir William had dined, rather late, and had not left the dining-room till about nine o'clock. He spent the evening there, too, the waiter knew, or at least some of it, for he himself had taken him a whisky-and-soda in the lounge not less than half an hour later.

Roger retired.

He retired to Merton's, in a taxi.

It seemed that he wanted some new notepaper printed, of a very special kind, and to the young woman behind the counter he specified at great length and in wearisome detail exactly what he did want. The young woman handed him the books of specimen pieces and asked him to see if there was any style there which would suit him. Roger glanced through them, remarking garrulously to the young woman that he had been recommended to Merton's by a very dear friend, whose photograph he happened to have on him at that moment. Wasn't that a curious coincidence? The young woman agreed that it was.

"About a fortnight ago, I think, my friend was in here last," said Roger, producing the photograph. "Recognise this?"

The young woman took the photograph, without apparent interest.

"Oh, yes. I remember. About some notepaper, too, wasn't it? So that's your friend. Well, it's a small world. Now this is a line we're selling a good deal of just now."

Roger went back to his rooms to dine. Afterwards, feeling restless, he wandered out of the Albany and turned up Piccadilly. He wandered round the Circus, thinking hard, and paused for a moment out of habit to inspect the photographs of the new reveue hung outside the Pavilion. The next thing he realised was that he

had got as far as Jermyn Street and was standing outside the Imperial Theatre. Glancing at the advertisements of *The Creaking Skull,* he saw that it began at half-past eight. Glancing at his watch, he saw that the time was twenty-nine minutes past that hour. He had an evening to get through somehow. He went inside.

The next morning, very early for Roger, he called on Moresby at Scotland Yard.

"Moresby," he said without preamble, "I want you to do something for me. Can you find me a taximan who took a fare from Piccadilly Circus or its neighbourhood at about ten past nine on the evening before the Beresford crime, to the Strand somewhere near the bottom of Southampton Street, and another who took a fare back between those points. I'm not sure about the first. Or one taxi might have been used for the double journey, but I doubt that. Anyhow, try to find out for me, will you?"

"What are you up to now, Mr. Sheringham?" Moresby asked suspiciously.

"Breaking down an interesting alibi," replied Roger serenely. "By the way, I know who sent those chocolates to Sir William. I'm just building up a nice structure of evidence for you. Ring up my rooms when you've got those taximen."

He strolled out, leaving Moresby positively gaping after him.

The rest of the day he spent apparently trying to buy a second-hand typewriter. He was very particular that it should be a Hamilton No. 4. When the shop-people tried to induce him to consider other makes he refused to look at them, saying that he had had the Hamilton No. 4 so strongly recommended to him by a friend who had bought one about three weeks ago. Perhaps it was at this very shop? No? They hadn't sold a Hamilton No. 4 for the last three months? How odd.

But at one shop they had sold a Hamilton No. 4 within the last month, and that was odder still.

At half-past four Roger got back to his rooms to await the telephone message from Moresby. At half-past five it came.

"There are fourteen taxi-drivers here, littering up my office," said Moresby offensively. "What do you want me to do with 'em?"

"Keep them till I come, Chief Inspector," returned Roger with dignity.

The interview with the fourteen was brief enough, however. To each man in turn Roger showed a photograph, holding it so that

Moresby could not see it, and asked if he could recognise his fare. The ninth man did so, without hesitation.

At a nod from Roger, Moresby dismissed them, then sat at his table and tried to look official. Roger seated himself on the table, looking most unofficial, and swung his legs. As he did so, a photograph fell unnoticed out of his pocket and fluttered, face downwards, under the table. Moresby eyed it but did not pick it up.

"And now, Mr. Sheringham, sir," he said, "perhaps you'll tell me what you've been doing?"

"Certainly, Moresby," said Roger blandly. "Your work for you. I really have solved the thing, you know. Here's your evidence." He took from his note-case an old letter and handed it to the Chief Inspector. "Was that typed on the same machine as the forged letter from Mason's, or was it not?"

Moresby studied it for a moment, then drew the forged letter from a drawer of his table and compared the two minutely.

"Mr. Sheringham," he said soberly, "where did you get hold of this?"

"In a second-hand typewriter shop in St. Martin's Lane. The machine was sold to an unknown customer about a month ago. They identified the customer from that same photograph. As it happened, this machine had been used for a time in the office after it was repaired, to see that it was O.K., and I easily got hold of that specimen of its work."

"And where is the machine now?"

"Oh, at the bottom of the Thames, I expect," Roger smiled. "I tell you, this criminal takes no unnecessary chances. But that doesn't matter. There's your evidence."

"Humph! It's all right so far as it goes," conceded Moresby. "But what about Mason's paper?"

"That," said Roger calmly, "was extracted from Merton's book of sample notepapers, as I'd guessed from the very yellowed edges might be the case. I can prove contact of the criminal with the book, and there is a gap which will certainly turn out to have been filled by that piece of paper."

"That's fine," Moresby said more heartily.

"As for the taximan, the criminal had an alibi. You've heard it broken down. Between ten past nine and twenty-ve past, in fact during the time when the parcel must have been posted, the murderer took a hurried journey to that neighbourhood, going probably by 'bus or Underground, but returning, as I expected, by taxi, because time would be getting short."

"And the murderer, Mr. Sheringham?"

"The person whose photograph is in my pocket," Roger said unkindly. "By the way, do you remember what I was saying the other day about Chance the Avenger, my excellent film-title? Well, it's worked again. By a chance meeting in Bond Street with a silly woman I was put, by the merest accident, in possession of a piece of information which showed me then and there who had sent those chocolates addressed to Sir William. There were other possibilities, of course, and I tested them, but then and there on the pavement I saw the whole thing, from first to last."

"Who was the murderer, then, Mr. Sheringham?" repeated Moresby.

"It was so beautifully planned," Roger went on dreamily. "We never grasped for one moment that we were making the fundamental mistake that the murderer all along intended us to make."

"And what was that?" asked Moresby.

"Why, that the plan had miscarried. That the wrong person had been killed. That was just the beauty of it. The plan had *not* miscarried. It had been brilliantly successful. The wrong person was *not* killed. Very much the right person was."

Moresby gaped.

"Why, how on earth do you make that out, sir?"

"Mrs. Beresford was the objective all the time. That's why the plot was so ingenious. Everything was anticipated. It was perfectly natural that Sir William should hand the chocolates over to Beresford. It was foreseen that we should look for the criminal among Sir William's associates and not the dead woman's. It was probably even foreseen that the crime would be considered the work of a woman!"

Moresby, unable to wait any longer, snatched up the photograph.

"Good heavens! But Mr. Sheringham, you don't mean to tell me that . . . Sir William himself!"

"He wanted to get rid of Mrs. Beresford," Roger continued. "He had liked her well enough at the beginning, no doubt, though it was her money he was after all the time.

"But the real trouble was that she was too close with her money. He wanted it, or some of it, pretty badly; and she wouldn't part. There's no doubt about the motive. I made a list of the firms he's interested in and got a report on them. They're all rocky, every one. He'd got through all his own money, and he had to get more.

"As for the nitrobenzine which puzzled us so much, that was simple enough. I looked it up and found that beside the uses you told me, it's used largely in perfumery. And he's got a perfumery business. The Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company. That's how he'd know about it being poisonous, of course. But I shouldn't think he got his supply from there. He'd be cleverer than that. He probably made the stuff himself. Any schoolboy knows how to treat benzol with nitric acid to get nitrobenzine."

"But," stammered Moresby, "but Sir William . . . He was at Eton."

"Sir William?" said Roger sharply. "Who's talking about Sir William? I told you the photograph of the murderer was in my pocket." He whipped out the photograph in question and confronted the astounded Chief Inspector with it. "Beresford, man! Beresford's the murderer of his own wife.

"Beresford, who still had hankerings after a gay life," he went on more mildly, "didn't want his wife but did want her money. He contrived this plot, providing as he thought against every contingency that could possibly arise. He established a mild alibi, if suspicion ever should arise, by taking his wife to the Imperial, and slipped out of the theatre at the first interval. (I sat through the first act of the dreadful thing myself last night to see when the interval came.) Then the hurried down to the Strand, posted his parcel, and took a taxi back. He had ten minutes, but nobody would notice if he got back to the box a minute late.

"And the rest simply followed. He knew Sir William came to the club every morning at ten-thirty, as regularly as clockwork; he knew that for a psychological certainty he could get the chocolates handed over to him if he hinted for them; he knew that the police would go chasing after all sorts of false trails starting from Sir William. And as for the wrapper and the forged letter, he carefully didn't destroy them because they were calculated not only to divert suspicion but actually to point away from him to some anonymous lunatic."

"Well, it's very smart of you, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby said, with a little sigh, but quite ungrudgingly. "Very smart indeed. What was it the lady told you that showed you the whole thing in a flash?"

"Why, it wasn't so much what she actually told me as what I heard between her words, so to speak. What she told me was that Mrs. Beresford knew the answer to that bet; what I deduced was that, being the sort of person she was, it was quite incredible

that she should have made a bet to which she knew the answer. *Ergo,* she didn't. *Ergo,* there never was such a bet. *Ergo,* Beresford was lying. *Ergo,* Beresford wanted to get hold of those chocolates for some reason other than he stated. After all, we only had Beresford's word for the bet, hadn't we?

"Of course he wouldn't have left her that afternoon till he'd seen her take, or somehow made her take, at least six of the chocolates, more than a lethal dose. That's why the stuff was in those meticulous six-minimum doses. And so that he could take a couple himself, of course. A clever stroke, that."

Moresby rose to his feet.

"Well, Mr. Sheringham, I'm much obliged it you, sir. And now I shall have to get busy myself." He scratched his head. "Chance the Avenger, eh? Well, I can tell you one pretty big thing Beresford left to Chance the Avenger, Mr. Sheringham. Suppose Sir William hadn't handed over the chocolates after all? Supposing he'd kept 'em, to give to one of his own ladies?"

Roger positively snorted. He felt a personal pride in Beresford by this time.

"Really, Moresby! It wouldn't have had any serious results if Sir William had. Do give my man credit for being what he is. You don't imagine he sent the poisoned ones to Sir William, do you? Of course not! He'd send harmless ones, and exchange them for the others on his way home. Dash it all, he wouldn't go right out of his way to present opportunities to Chance.

"If," added Roger, "Chance really is the right word."

Ernest Bramah

WHO KILLED CHARLIE WINPOLE?

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I

Some time during November of a recent year newspaper readers who are in the habit of being attracted by curious items of quite negligible importance might have followed the account of the

tragedy of a St. Abbots schoolboy which appeared in the Press under the headings, "Fatal Dish of Mushrooms," "Are Toadstools Distinguishable?" or other similarly alluring titles.

The facts relating to the death of Charlie Winpole were simple and straightforward and the jury sworn to the business of investigating the cause had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. The witnesses who had anything really material to contribute were only two in number—Mrs. Dupreen and Robert Wilberforce Slark, M.D. A couple of hours would easily have disposed of every detail of an inquiry that was generally admitted to have been a pure formality, had not the contention of an interested person delayed the inevitable conclusion by forcing the necessity of an adjournment.

Irene Dupreen testified that she was the widow of a physician and lived at Hazlehurst, Chesset Avenue, St. Abbots, with her brother. The deceased was their nephew, an only child and an orphan, and was aged twelve. He was a Ward of Chancery and the Court had appointed her as guardian, with an adequate provision for the expenses of his keep and education. That allowance would, of course, cease with her nephew's death.

Coming to the particulars of the case, Mrs. Dupreen explained that for a few days the boy had been suffering from a rather severe cold. She had not thought it necessary to call in a doctor, recognising it as a mild form of influenza. She kept him from school and restricted him to his bedroom. On the previous Wednesday, the day before his death, he was quite convalescent, with a good pulse and a normal temperature, but as the weather was cold she decided still to keep him in bed as a measure of precaution. He had a fair appetite, but did not care for the lunch they had, and so she asked him, before going out in the afternoon, if there was anything that he would especially fancy for his dinner. He had thereupon expressed a wish for some mushrooms, of which he was always very fond.

"I laughed and pulled his ear," continued the witness, much affected at her recollection, "and asked him if that was his idea of a suitable dish for an invalid. But I didn't think that it really mattered in the least then, so I went to several shops about them. They all said that mushrooms were over, but finally I found a few at Lackington's, the greengrocer in Park Road. I bought only half-a-pound; no one but Charlie among us cared for them and I thought that they were already very dry and rather dear."

The connection between the mushrooms and the unfortunate

boy's death seemed inevitable. When Mrs. Dupreen went upstairs after dinner she found Charlie apparently asleep and breathing soundly. She quietly removed the tray and without disturbing him turned out the gas and closed the door. In the middle of the night she was suddenly and startingly awakened by something. For a moment she remained confused, listening. Then a curious sound coming from the direction of the boy's bedroom drew her there. On opening the door she was horrified to see her nephew lying on the floor in a convulsed attitude. His eyes were open and widely dilated; one hand clutched some bed-clothes which he had dragged down with him, and the other still grasped the empty water-bottle that had been by his side. She called loudly for help and her brother and then the servant appeared. She sent the latter to a medicine cabinet for mustard leaves and told her brother to get in the nearest available doctor. She had already lifted Charlie on to the bed again. Before the doctor arrived, which was in about half-an-hour, the boy was dead.

In answer to a question the witness stated that she had not seen her nephew between the time she removed the tray and when she found him ill. The only other person who had seen him within a few hours of his death had been her brother, Philip Loudham, who had taken up Charlie's dinner. When he came down again he had made the remark: "The youngster seems lively enough now."

Dr. Slark was the next witness. His evidence was to the effect that about three-fifteen on the Thursday morning he was hurriedly called to Hazlehurst by a gentleman whom he now knew to be Mr. Philip Loudham. He understood that the case was one of convulsions and went provided for that contingency, but on his arrival he found the patient already dead. From his own examination and from what he was told he had no hesitation in diagnosing the case as one of agaric poisoning. He saw no reason to suspect any of the food except the mushrooms, and all the symptoms pointed to bhurine, the deadly principle of *Amanita Bhuroides,* or the Black Cap, as it was popularly called, from its fancied resemblance to the head-dress assumed by a judge in passing death sentence, coupled with its sinister and well-merited reputation. It was always fatal.

Continuing his evidence, Dr. Slark explained that only after maturity did the Black Cap develop its distinctive appearance. Up to that stage it had many of the characteristics of *Agaricus campestris,* or common mushroom. It was true that the gills were

paler than one would expect to find, and there were other slight differences of a technical kind, but all might easily be overlooked in the superficial glance of the gatherer. The whole subject of edible and noxious fungi was a difficult one and at present very imperfectly understood. He, personally, very much doubted if true mushrooms were ever responsible for the cases of poisoning which one occasionally saw attributed to them. Under scientific examination he was satisfied that all would resolve themselves into poisoning by one or other of the many noxious fungi that could easily be mistaken for the edible varieties. It was possible to prepare an artificial bed, plant it with proper spawn and be rewarded by a crop of mushroom-like growth of undoubted virulence. On the other hand, the injurious constituents of many poisonous fungi passed off in the process of cooking. There was no handy way of discriminating between the good and the bad except by the absolute identification of species. The salt test and the silver-spoon test were all nonsense and the sooner they were forgotten the better. Apparent mushrooms that were found in woods or growing in the vicinity of trees or hedges should always be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

Dr. Slark's evidence concluded the case so far as the subpœnaed witnesses were concerned, but before addressing the jury the coroner announced that another person had expressed a desire to be heard. There was no reason why they should not accept any evidence that was tendered, and as the applicant's name had been mentioned in the case it was only right that he should have the opportunity or replying publicly.

Mr. Lackington thereupon entered the witness-box and was sworn. He stated that he was a fruiterer and greengrocer, carrying on a business in Park Road, St. Abbots. He remembered Mrs. Dupreen coming to his shop two days before. The basket of mushrooms from which she was supplied consisted of a small lot of about six pounds, brought in by a farmer from a neighbouring village, with whom he had frequent dealings. All had been disposed of and in no other case had illness resulted. It was a serious matter to him as a tradesman to have his name associated with a case of this kind. That was why he had come forward. Not only with regard to mushrooms, but as a general result, people would become shy of dealing with him if it was stated that he had sold unwholesome goods.

The coroner, intervening at this point, remarked that he might as well say that he would direct the jury that, in the event of their

finding the deceased to have died from the effects of the mushrooms or anything contained among them, that there was no evidence other than that the occurrence was one of pure mischance.

Mr. Lackington expressed his thanks for the assurance, but said that a bad impression would still remain. He had been in business in St. Abbots for twenty-seven years and during that time he had handled some tons of mushrooms without a single complaint before. He admitted, in answer to the interrogation, that he had not actually examined every mushroom in the half-pound sold to Mrs. Dupreen, but he had weighed them, and he was confident that if a toadstool had been among them he would have detected it. Might it not be a cooking utensil that was the cause?

Dr. Slark shook his head and was understood to say that he could not accept the suggestion.

Continuing, Mr. Lackington then asked whether it was not possible that the deceased, doubtless an inquiring adventurous boy and as mischievous as most of his kind, feeling quite well again and being confined to the house, had got up in his aunt's absence and taken something that would explain this sad affair? They had heard of a medicine cabinet. What about tablets of trional or veronal or something of that sort that might perhaps look like sweets? . . . It was all very well for Dr. Slark to laugh, but this matter was a serious one for the witness.

Dr. Slark apologised for smiling—he had not laughed—and gravely remarked that the matter was a serious one for all concerned in the inquiry. He admitted that the reference to trional and veronal had, for the moment, caused him to forget the surroundings. He would suggest that in the circumstances perhaps the coroner would think it desirable to order a more detailed examination of the body to be made.

After some further discussion the coroner, while remarking that in most cases an analysis was quite unnecessary, decided that in view of what had transpired it would be more satisfactory to have a complete autopsy made. The inquest was accordingly adjourned.

A week later most of those who had taken part in the first inquiry assembled again in the room of the St. Abbots Town Hall which did duty for the Coroner's Court. Only one witness was heard and his evidence was brief and conclusive.

Dr. Herbert Ingpenny, consulting pathologist to St. Martin's Hospital stated that he had made an examination of the contents

of the stomach and viscera of the deceased. He found evidence of the presence of the poison bhurine in sufficient quantity to account for the boy's death, and the symptoms, as described by Dr. Slark and Mrs. Dupreen, in the course of the previous hearing, were consistent with bhurine poisoning. Bhurine did not occur naturally except as a constituent of *Amanita Bhuroides*. One-fifth of a grain would be fatal to an adult; in other words a single fungus in the dish might poison three people. A child, especially if experiencing the effects of a weakening illness, would be even more susceptible. No other harmful substance was present.

Dr. Ingpenny concluded by saying that he endorsed his colleague's general remarks on the subject of mushrooms and other fungi, and the jury, after a plain direction from the coroner, forthwith brought in a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.

It was a foregone conclusion with anyone who knew the facts or had followed the evidence. Yet five days later Philip Loundham was arrested suddenly and charged with the astounding crime of having murdered his nephew.

II

It is at this point that Max Carrados makes his first appearance in the Winpole tragedy.

A few days after the arrest, being in a particularly urbane frame of mind himself, and having several hours with no demands on them that could not be fitly transferred to his subordinates, Mr. Carlyle looked round for some social entertainment, and with a benevolent condescension very opportunely remembered the existence of his niece living at Groat's Heath.

"Elsie will be delighted," he assured himself, on evolving this suggestion. "She is rather out of the world up there, I imagine. Now if I get across by four, put in a couple of hours . . ."

Mrs. Bellmark was certainly pleased, but she appeared to be still more surprised at something, and behind that lay an effervescence of excitement that even to Mr. Carlyle's complacent self-esteem seemed out of proportion to the occasion. The reason could not be long withheld.

"Did you meet anyone, Uncle Louis?" was almost her first inquiry.

"Did I meet anyone?" repeated Mr. Carlyle with his usual

precision. "Um, no, I cannot say that I met anyone particular. Of course——"

"I've had a visitor and he's coming back again for tea. Guess who it is? But you never will. Mr. Carrados."

"Max Carrados!" exclaimed her uncle in astonishment. "You don't say so. Why, bless my soul, Elsie, I'd almost forgotten that you knew him. It seems years ago—what on earth is Max doing in Groat's Heath?"

"That is the extraordinary thing about it," replied Mrs. Bellmark. "He said that he had come up here to look for mushrooms."

"Mushrooms?"

"Yes; that was what he said. He asked me if I knew of any woods about here that he could go into and I told him of the one down Stonecut Lane."

"But don't you know, my dear child," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, "that mushrooms growing in woods or even near trees are always to be regarded with suspicion? They may look like mushrooms, but they are probably poisonous."

"I didn't know," admitted Mrs. Bellmark; "but if they are, I imagine Mr. Carrados will know."

"It scarcely sounds like it—going to a wood, you know. As it happens, I have been looking up the subject lately. But, in any case, you say that he is coming back here?"

"He asked me if he might call on his way home for a cup of tea, and of course, I said, 'of course.' "

"Of course," also said Mr. Carlyle. "Motoring, I suppose?"

"Yes, a big grey car. He had Mr. Parkinson with him."

Mr. Carlyle was slightly puzzled, as he frequently was by his friend's proceedings, but it was not his custom to dwell on any topic that involved an admission of inadequacy. The subject of Carrados and his eccentric quest was therefore dismissed until the sound of a formidable motor car dominating the atmosphere of the quiet suburban road was almost immediately followed by the entrance of the blind amateur. With a knowing look towards his niece Carlyle had taken up a position at the farther end of the room, where he remained in almost breathless silence.

Carrados acknowledged the hostess's smiling greeting and then nodded familiarly in the direction of the playful guest.

"Well, Louis," he remarked, "we've caught each other."

Mrs. Bellmark was perceptibly startled, but rippled musically at the failure of the conspiracy.

"Extraordinary," admitted Mr. Carlyle, coming forward.

"Not so very," was the dry reply. "Your friendly little maid" —to Mrs. Bellmark—"mentioned your visitor as she brought me in."

"Is it a fact, Max," demanded Mr. Carlyle, "that you have been to—er—Stonecut Wood to get mushrooms?"

"Mrs. Bellmark told you?"

"Yes. And did you succeed?"

"Parkinson found something that he assured me looked just like mushrooms."

Mr. Carlyle bestowed a triumphant glance on his niece.

"I should very much like to see these so-called mushrooms. Do you know, it may be rather a good thing for you that I met you."

"It is always a good thing for me to meet you," replied Carrados. "You shall see them. They are in the car. Perhaps I shall be able to take you back to town?"

"If you are going very soon. No, no, Elsie"—in response to Mrs. Bellmark's protesting "Oh!"—"I don't want to influence Max, but I really must tear myself away the moment after tea. I still have to clear up some work on a rather important case I am just completing. It is quite appropriate to the occasion, too. Do you happen to know all about the Winpole business, Max?"

"No," admitted Carrados, without any appreciable show of interest. "Do you, Louis?"

"Yes," responded Mr. Carlyle with crisp assurance, "yes, I think that I may claim I do. In fact it was I who obtained the evidence that induced the authorities to take up the case against Loudham."

"Oh, do tell us all about it," exclaimed Elsie. "I have only seen something in the *Indicator*."

Mr. Carlyle shook his head, hemmed and looked wise, and then gave in.

"But not a word of this outside, Elsie," he stipulated. "Some of the evidence won't be given until next week and it might be serious——"

"Not a syllable," assented the lady. "How exciting! Go on."

"Well, you know, of course, that the coroner's jury—very rightly, according to the evidence before them—brought in a verdict of accidental death. In the circumstances it was a reflection on the business methods or the care or the knowledge or whatever one may decide of the man who sold the mushrooms, a greengrocer called Lackington. I have seen Lackington, and with a

rather remarkable pertinacity in the face of the evidence he insists that he could not have made this fatal blunder—that in weighing so small a quantity as half-a-pound, at any rate, he would at once have spotted anything that wasn't quite all right."

"But the doctor said, Uncle Louis——"

"Yes, my dear Elsie, we know what the doctor said, but, rightly or wrongly, Lackington backs his experience and practical knowledge against theoretical generalities. In ordinary circumstances nothing more would have come of it, but it happens that Lackington has for a lodger a young man on the staff of the local paper, and for a neighbour a pharmaceutical chemist. These three men talking things over more than once—Lackington restive under the damage that had been done to his reputation, the journalist stimulating and keen for a newspaper sensation, the chemist contributing his quota of practical knowledge. At the end of a few days a fabric of circumstance had been woven which might be serious or innocent according to the further development of the suggestion and the manner in which it could be met. These were the chief points of the attack:

"Mrs. Dupreen's allowance for the care and maintenance of Charlie Winpole ceased with his death, as she had told the jury. What she did not mention was that the deceased boy would have come into an inheritance of some fifteen thousand pounds at age and that this fortune now fell in equal shares to the lot of his two nearest relatives—Mrs. Dupreen and her brother Philip.

"Mrs. Dupreen was by no means in easy circumstances. Philip Loudham was equally poor and had no assured income. He had tried several forms of business and now, at about thirty-five, was spending his time chiefly in writing poems and painting water-colours, none of which brought him in any money so far as one could learn.

"Philip Loudham, it was admitted, took up the food round which the tragedy centred.

"Philip Loudham was shown to be in debt and urgently in need of money. There was supposed to be a lady in the case—I hope I need say no more, Elsie."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Bellmark with poignant interest.

"We do not know yet. A married woman, it is rumoured, I regret to say. It scarcely matters—certainly not to you, Elsie. To continue:

"Mrs. Dupreen got back from her shopping in the afternoon before her nephew's death at about three o'clock. In less than

half-an-hour Loudham left the house and going to the station took a return ticket to Euston. He left by the 3.41 and was back in St. Abbots at 5.43. That would give him barely an hour in town for whatever business he transacted. What was that business?

"The chemist next door supplied the information that although bhurine only occurs in nature in this one form, it can be isolated from the other constituents of the fungus and dealt with like any other liquid poison. But it was a very exceptional commodity, having no commercial uses and probably not half-a-dozen retail chemists in London had it on their shelves. He himself had never stocked it and never been asked for it.

"With this suggestive but by no means convincing evidence," continued Mr. Carlyle, "the young journalist went to the editor of *The Morning Indicator*, to which he acted as St. Abbots correspondent and asked him whether he cared to take up the inquiry as a 'scoop.' The local trio had carried it as far as they were able. The editor of the *Indicator* decided to look into it and asked me to go on with the case. This is how my connection with it arose."

"Oh, that's how newspapers get to know things?" commented Mrs. Bellmark. "I often wondered."

"It is one way," assented her uncle.

"An American development," contributed Carrados. "It is a little overdone there."

"It must be awful," said the hostess. "And the police methods! In the plays that come from the States——" The entrance of the friendly handmaiden, bringing tea, was responsible for this platitudinous wave. The conversation, in deference to Mr. Carlyle's scruples, marked time until the door closed on her departure.

"My first business," continued the inquiry agent, after making himself useful at the table, "was naturally to discover among the chemists in London whether a sale of bhurine coincided with Philip Loudham's hasty visit. If this line failed, the very foundation of the edifice of hypothetical guilt gave way; if it succeeded ... Well, it did succeed. In a street off Caistor Square, Tottenham Court Road—Trenion Street—we found a man called Lightcraft who at once remembered making such a sale. As bhurine is a specified poison the transaction would have to be entered, and Lightcraft's book contained this unassailable piece of evidence. On Wednesday, the sixth of this month, a man signing his name as 'J. D. Williams,' and giving '25 Chalcott Place' as his address, purchased four drachms of bhurine. Lightcraft fixed the time as

about half-past four. I went to 25 Chalcott Place and found it to be a small boarding-house. No one of the name of Williams was known there."

If Mr. Carlyle's tone of finality went for anything, Philip Loudham was as good as pinioned. Mrs. Bellmark supplied the expected note of admiration.

"Just fancy!" was the form it took.

"Under the Act the purchaser must be known to the chemist?" suggested Carrados.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Carlyle; "and there our friend Lightcraft may have let himself in for a little trouble. But, as he says—and we must admit that there is something in it—who is to define what 'known to' actually means? A hundred people are known to him as regular or occasional customers and he has never heard their names; a score of names and addresses represent to him regular or occasional customers whom he has never seen. This 'J. D. Williams' came in with an easy air and appeared at all events to know Lightcraft. The face seemed not unfamiliar and Lightcraft was perhaps a little too facile in assuming that he *did* know him. Well, well, Max, I can understand the circumstances. Competition is keen—especially against the private chemist—and one may give offence and lose a customer. We must all live."

"Except Charlie Winpole," occurred to Max Carrados, but he left the retort unspoken. "Did you happen to come across any inquiry for bhurine at other shops?" he asked instead.

"No," replied Carlyle, "no, I did not. It would have been an indication then, of course, but after finding the actual place the others would have no significance. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing. Only don't you think that he was rather lucky in getting it first shot if our St. Abbots authority was right?"

"Yes, yes; perhaps he was. But this is of no interest to us now. The great thing is that a peculiarly sinister and deliberate murder is brought home to its perpetrator. When you consider the circumstances, upon my soul, I don't know that I have ever unmasked a more ingenious and cold-blooded ruffian."

"Then he has confessed, uncle?"

"Confessed, my dear Elsie," said Mr. Carlyle with a tolerant smile, "no, he has not confessed—men of that type never do. On the contrary, he asserted his outraged innocence with a considerable show of indignation. What else was he to do? Then he was asked to account for his movements between 4.15 and 5 o'clock on that afternoon. Egad, the fellow was so cocksure of the safety

of his plans that he hadn't even taken the trouble to think that out. First, he denied that he had been away from St. Abbots at all. Then he remembered. He had run down to town in the afternoon for a few things.—What things?—Well, chiefly stationery.—Where had he bought it?—At a shop in Oxford Street; he did not know the name.—Would he be able to point it out?—He thought so.—Could he identify the attendant?—No, he could not remember him in the least.—Had he the bill?—No, he never kept small bills.—How much was the amount?—About three or four shillings.—And the return fare to Euston was three-and-eightpence. Was it not rather an extravagant journey?—He could only say that he did so.—Three or four shillings' worth of stationery would be a moderate parcel. Did he have it sent?—No, he took it with him.—Three or four shillings' worth of stationery in his pocket?—No, it was in a parcel.—Too large to go in his pocket?—Yes.—Two independent witnesses would testify that he carried no parcel. They were townsmen of St. Abbots who had travelled down in the same carriage with him. Did he still persist that he had been engaged in buying stationery? Then he declined to say anything further—about the best thing he could do."

"And Lightcraft identifies him?"

"Um, well, not quite so positively as we might wish. You see, a fortnight has elapsed. The man who bought the poison wore a moustache—put on, of course—but Lightcraft will say that there is a resemblance and the type of the two men the same."

"I foresee that Mr. Lightcraft's accommodating memory for faces will come in for rather severe handling in cross-examination," said Carrados, as though he rather enjoyed the prospect.

"It will balance Mr. Philip Loudham's unfortunate forgetfulness for localities, Max," rejoined Mr. Carlyle, delivering the thrust with his own inimitable aplomb.

Carrados rose with smiling acquiescence to the shrewdness of the riposte.

"I will be quite generous, Mrs. Bellmark," he observed, "I will take him away now, with the memory of that lingering in your ears—all my crushing retorts unspoken."

"Five-thirty, egad!" exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, displaying his imposing gold watch. "We must—or, at all events, I must. You can think of them in the car, Max."

"I do hope you won't come to blows," murmured the lady. Then she added: "When will the real trial come on, Uncle Louis?"

"The Sessions? Oh, early in January."

"I must remember to look out for it." Possibly she had some faint idea of Uncle Louis taking a leading part in the proceedings. At any rate Mr. Carlyle looked pleased, but when adieux had been taken and the door was closed Mrs. Bellmark was left wondering what the enigma of Max Carrados's departing smile had been.

III

It was when they were in the car that Mr. Carlyle suddenly remembered the suspected mushrooms and demanded to be shown them. A very moderate collection was produced for his inspection. He turned them over sceptically.

"The gills are too pale for true mushrooms, Max," he declared sapiently. "Don't take any risk. Let me pitch them out of the window?"

"No." Carrados's hand quietly arrested the threatened action. "No; I have a use for them, Louis, but it is not culinary. You are quite right; they are rank poison. I only want to study them for . . . a case I am interested in."

"A case! You don't mean to say that there is another mushroom poisoner going?"

"No; it is the same."

"But—but you said——"

"That I did not know all about it? Quite true. Nor do I yet. But I know rather more than I did then."

"Do you mean that Scotland Yard——"

"No, Louis." Mr. Carrados appeared to find something rather amusing in the situation. "I am for the other side."

"The other side! And you let me babble out the whole case for the prosecution! Well, really, Max!"

"But you are out of it now? The Public Prosecutor has taken it up?"

"True, true. But, for all that, I feel devilishly bad."

"Then I will give you the whole case for the defence and so we shall be quits. In fact I am relying on you to help me with it."

"With the defence? I—after supplying the evidence that the Public Prosecutor is acting on?"

"Why not? You don't want to hang Philip Loudham—especially if he happens to be innocent—do you?"

"I don't want to hang anyone," protested Mr. Carlyle. "At least—not as a private individual."

"Quite so. Well, suppose you and I between ourselves find out the actual facts of the case and decide what is to be done. The more usual course is for the prosecution to exaggerate all that tells against the accused and to contradict everything in his favour; for the defence to advance fictitious evidence of innocence and to lie roundly on everything that endangers his client; while on both sides witnesses are piled up to bemuse the jury into accepting the desired version. That does not always make for impartiality or for justice. . . . Now you and I are two reasonable men, Louis——"

"I hope so," admitted Mr. Carlyle. "I think so."

"You can give away the case for the prosecution and I will expose the weakness of the defence, so, between us, we may arrive at the truth."

"It strikes me as a deuced irregular proceeding. But I am curious to hear the defence all the same."

"You are welcome to all of it that there yet is. An alibi, of course."

"Ah!" commented Mr. Carlyle with expression.

"So recently as yesterday a lady came hurriedly, and with a certain amount of secrecy, to see me. She came on the strength of the introduction afforded by a mutual acquaintanceship with Fromow, the Greek professor. When we were alone she asked me —besought me, in fact—to advise her what to do. A few hours before, Mrs. Dupreen had rushed across London to her with the tale of young Loudham's arrest. Then out came the whole story. This woman—well, her name is Guestling, Louis—lives a little way down in Surrey and is married. Her husband, according to her own account—and I have certainly heard a hint about it elsewhere—leads her a studiedly outrageous existence; an admired silken-mannered gentleman in society, a tolerable pole-cat at home, one infers. About a year ago Mrs. Guestling made the acquaintance of Loudham, who was staying in that neighbourhood painting his pretty unsaleable country lanes and golden sunsets. The inevitable, or, to accept the lady's protestations, half the inevitable, followed. Guestling, who adds an insatiable jealousy to his other domestic virtues, vetoed the new acquaintance and thenceforward the two met hurriedly and furtively in town. Had either of them any money they might have snatched their destinies from the hands of Fate and gone off together, but she has nothing and he has nothing and both, I suppose, are poor mortals when it comes to doing anything courageous and out-

right in this censorious world. So they drifted, drifting but not yet wholly wrecked."

"A formidable incentive for a weak and desperate man to secure a fortune by hook or crook, Max," said Carlyle drily.

"That is the motive that I wish to make you a present of. But, as you will insist on your side, it is also a motive for a weak and foolish couple to steal every brief opportunity for a secret meeting. On Wednesday, the sixth, the lady was returning home from a visit to some friends in the Midlands. She saw in the occasion an opportunity, and on the morning of the sixth a message appeared in the personal columns of the *Daily Telegraph*—their usual channel of communication—making an assignation. That much can be established by the irrefutable evidence of the newspaper. Philip Loudham kept the appointment and for half-an-hour this miserably happy pair sat holding each other's hands in a dreary deserted waiting-room of Bishop's Road Station. That half-hour was from 4.15 to 4.45. Then Loudham saw Mrs. Guestling into Praed Street Station for Victoria, returned to Euston and just caught the 5.7 St. Abbots."

"Can this be corroborated—especially as regards the precise time they were together?"

"Not a word of it. They chose the waiting-room at Bishop's Road for seclusion, and apparently they got it. Not a soul even looked in while they were there."

"Then, by Jupiter, Max," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle with some emotion, "you have hanged your client!"

Carrados could not restrain a smile at his friend's tragic note of triumph.

"Well, let us examine the rope," he said with his usual imperturbability.

"Here it is." It was a trivial enough shred of evidence that the inquiry agent took from his pocket-book and put into the expectant hand; in point of fact the salmon-coloured ticket of a "London General" omnibus.

"Royal Oak—the stage nearest Paddington—to Tottenham Court Road—the point nearest Trenion Street," he added significantly.

"Yes," acquiesced Carrados, taking it.

"The man who bought the bhurine dropped that ticket on the floor of the shop. He left the door open and Lightcraft followed him to close it. That is how he came to pick the ticket up, and he remembers that it was not there before. Then he threw it into a

wastepaper basket underneath the counter, and that is where we found it when I called on him."

"Mr. Lightcraft's memory fascinates me, Louis," was the blind man's unruffled comment. "Let us drop in and have a chat with him."

"Do you really think that here is anything more to be got in that quarter?" queried Carlyle dubiously. "I have turned him inside out, as you may be sure."

"True; but we approach Mr. Lightcraft from different angles. You were looking for evidence to prove young Loudham guilty. I am looking for evidence to prove him innocent."

"Very well, Max," acquiesced his companion. "Only don't blame me if it turns out as deuced awkward for your man as Mrs. G. has done. Shall I tell you what a counsel may be expected to put to the jury as the explanation of that lady's evidence?"

"No, thanks," said Carrados half sleepily from his corner. "Don't trouble; I know. I told her so."

IV

Mr. Lightcraft made no pretence of being glad to see his visitors. For some time he declined to open his mouth at all on the subject that had brought them there, repeating with parrot-like obstinacy to every remark on their part, "The matter is *sub judice*. I am unable to say anything further," until Mr. Carlyle longed to box his ears and bring him to his senses. For the ears happened to be unduly prominent and at that moment glowing with sensitiveness, while the chemist was otherwise a lank and pallid man, whose transparent ivory skin and well-defined moustache gave him something of the appearance of a waxwork.

"At all events," interposed Carrados, when his friend turned from the maddening reiteration in despair, "you don't mind telling me a few things about bhurine—apart from this particular connection?"

"I am very busy," and Mr. Lightcraft, with his back towards the shop, did something superfluous among the bottles on a shelf.

"I imagined that the time of Mr. Max Carrados, of whom even you may possibly have heard, is as valuable as yours, my good sir," put in Mr. Carlyle with scandalised dignity.

"Mr. Carrados?" Lightcraft turned and regarded the blind man with interest. "I did not know. But you must recognise the

unenviable position in which I am put by this gentleman's interference."

"It is his profession, you know," said Carrados mildly, "and in any case it would certainly have been someone. Why not help me to get you out of the position?"

"How is that possible?"

"If the case against Philip Loudham breaks down and he is discharged at the next hearing you would not be called upon further."

"That would certainly be a mitigation. But why should it break down?"

"Suppose you let me try the taste of bhurine," suggested Carrados. "You have some left?"

"Max, Max!" cried Mr. Carlyle's warning voice, "aren't you aware that the stuff is a deadly poison? One—fifth of a grain——"

"Mr. Lightcraft will know how to administer it."

Apparently Mr. Lightcraft did. He filled a graduated measure with cold water, dipped a slender glass rod into a bottle that was not kept on the shelves, and with it stirred the water. Then into another vessel of water he dropped a single drop of the dilution.

"One in a hundred and twenty-five thousand, Mr. Carrados," he said, offering him the mixture.

Carrados just touched the liquid with his lips, considered the impression and then wiped his mouth.

"Now the smell."

The unstoppered bottle was handed to him and he took in its exhalation.

"Stewed mushrooms!" was his comment. "What is it used for, Mr. Lightcraft?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"But your customer must have stated an application?"

The pallid chemist flushed a little at the recollection of that incident.

"Yes," he conceded. "There is a good deal about the whole business that is still a mystery to me. The man came in shortly after I had lit up and nodded familiarly as he said: 'Good-evening, Mr. Lightcraft.' I naturally assumed that he was someone whom I could not quite place. 'I want another half-pound of nitre,' he said and I served him. Had he bought nitre before, I have since tried to recall, but I cannot. It is a common enough article and I sell it, you might say, every day. I have a poor

memory for faces I am willing to admit. It has hampered me in business many a time: people expect you to remember them. We chatted about nothing in particular as I did up the packet. After he had paid and turned to go he looked back again. 'By the way, do you happen to have any bhurine?' he inquired. Unfortunately I had a few ounces. 'Of course you know its nature?' I cautioned him. 'May I ask what you require it for?' He nodded and held up the parcel of nitre he had in his hand. 'The same thing,' he replied, 'taxidermy.' Then I supplied him with half-an-ounce."

"As a matter of fact, is it used in taxidermy?"

"It does not seem to be. I don't stuff birds but I have made inquiry and no one knows of it. Nitre is largely used, and some of the dangerous poisons—arsenic and mercuric chloride, for instance—but not this although it might quite reasonably have been. No, it was a subterfuge."

"Now the poison book, if you please."

Mr. Lightcraft produced it without demur and the blind man ran his finger along the indicated line.

"Yes; this is quite in form. Is it a fact, Mr. Lightcraft, that not half-a-dozen chemists in London stock this particular substance? We are told that."

"I can quite believe it. I certainly don't know of another."

"Strangely enough, your customer of the sixth seems to have come straight here. Do you issue a price-list?"

"Only a localised one of certain photographic goods. Bhurine is not included."

"You can suggest no reason why Mr. Philip Loudham should be inspired to presume that he might be able to get this unusual drug from you? You have never corresponded with him nor come across his name or address before?"

"No. As far as I can recollect, I know nothing whatever of him."

"Then as yet we must assume that it was pure chance. By the way, Mr. Lightcraft, how does it come that *you* stock this rare poison, which has no commercial use and for which there is no demand?"

The chemist permitted himself to smile at the blunt terms of the inquiry.

"In the ordinary way I don't stock it," he replied. "This is a small quantity that I had over from my own use."

"Your own use? Oh, then it has a use after all?"

"No, scarcely that. Some time ago it leaked out in a corner of the photographic world that a great revolution in colour-photography was on the point of realisation by the use of bhurine in one of the processes. I, among others, at once took it up. Unfortunately it was only another instance of a discovery that is correct in theory breaking down in practice. Nothing came of it."

"Dear, dear me," said Carrados softly, with sympathetic understanding in his voice; "what a pity. You are interested in photography, Mr. Lightcraft?"

"It is the hobby of my life, sir. Of course most chemists dabble in it as a part of their business, but I devote all my spare time to experimenting. Colour-photography in particular."

"Colour-photography; yes. It has a great future. This bhurine process—I suppose it would have been of considerable financial value if it had worked?"

Mr. Lightcraft laughed quietly and rubbed his hands together. For the moment he had forgotten Loudham and the annoying case and lived in his enthusiasm.

"I should rather say it would, Mr. Carrados," he replied. "It would have been the most epoch-marking thing since Gaudin produced the first dry plate in '54. Consider it—the elaborate processes of Dyndale, Eiloff and Jupp reduced to the simplicity of a single contact print giving the entire range of chromatic variation. Financially it—it will scarcely bear thinking about in these times."

"Was it widely taken up"? asked Carrados.

"The bhurine idea?"

"Yes. You spoke of the secret leaking out. Were many in the know?"

"Not at all. The group of initiates was only a small one and I should imagine that, on reflection, every man kept it to himself. It certainly never became public. Then when the theory was definitely exploded of course no one took any further interest in it."

"Were all who were working on the same lines known to you, Mr. Lightcraft?"

"Well, yes; more or less I suppose they would be," said the chemist thoughtfully. "You see, the man who stumbled on the formula was a member of the Iris—a society of those interested in this subject, of which I am the secretary—and I don't think it ever got beyond the committee."

"How long ago was this?"

"A year—eighteen months. It led to unpleasantness and broke up the society."

"Suppose it happened to come to your knowledge that one of the original circle was quietly pursuing his experiments on the same lines with bhurine—what should you infer from it?"

Mr. Lightcraft considered. Then he regarded Carrados with a sharp, almost a startled, glance and then he fell to biting his nails in perplexed uncertainty.

"It would depend on who it was," he replied.

"Was there by any chance one who was unknown to you by sight but whose address you were familiar with?"

"Paulden!" exclaimed Mr. Lightcraft. "Paulden by heaven! I do believe you're right. He was the ablest of the lot and he never came to the meetings—a corresponding member. Southem, the original man who struck the idea, knew Paulden and told him of it. Southem was an impractical genius who would never be able to make anything work. Paulden—yes, Paulden it was who finally persuaded Southem that there was nothing in it. He sent a report to the same effect to be read at one of the meetings. So Paulden is taking up bhurine again——"

"Where does he live?" inquired Carrados.

"Ivor House, Wilmington Lane, Enstead. As secretary I have written there a score of times."

"It is on the Great Western—Paddington," commented the blind man. "Still, can you get out the addresses of the others, Mr. Lightcraft?"

"Certainly, certainly. I have the book of membership. But I am convinced now that Paulden was the man. I believe that I did actually see him once some years ago, but he has grown a moustache since."

"If you had been convinced of that a few days ago it would have saved us some awkwardness," volunteered Mr. Carlyle, with no little asperity.

"When you came before, Mr. Carlyle, you were so convinced yourself of it being Mr. Loudham that you wouldn't hear of me thinking of anyone else," retorted the chemist. "You will bear me out also that I never positively identified him as my customer. Now here is the book. Southem, Potter's Bar. Voynich, Islington. Crawford, Streatham Hill. Brown, Southampton Row. Vickers, Clapham Common. Tidey, Fulham. All those I knew quite well —associated with them week after week. Williams I didn't know

so closely. He is dead. Bigwood has gone to Canada. I don't think anyone else was in the bhurine craze—as we called it afterwards."

"But now? What would you call it now?" queried Carrados.

"Now? Well I hope that you will get me out of having to turn up at court and that sort of thing, Mr. Carrados. If Paulden is going on experimenting with bhurine again on the sly I shall want all my spare time to do the same myself!"

V

A few hours later the two investigators rang the bell of a substantial detached house in Enstead, the little country town twenty miles out in Berkshire, and asked to see Mr. Paulden.

"It is no good taking Lightcraft to identify the man," Carrados had decided. "If Paulden denied it, our friend's obliging record in that line would put him out of court."

"I maintain an open mind on the subject," Carlyle had replied. "Lightcraft is admittedly a very bending reed, but there is no reason why he should not have been right before and wrong to-day."

They were shown into a ceremonial reception-room to wait. Mr. Carlyle diagnosed snug circumstances and the tastes of an in-doors, comfort-loving man in the surroundings.

The door opened, but it was to admit a middle-aged, matronly lady with good-humour and domestic capability proclaimed by every detail of her smiling face and easy manner.

"You wished to see my husband?" she asked with friendly courtesy.

"Mr. Paulden? Yes, we should like to," replied Carlyle, with his most responsive urbanity. "It is a matter that need not occupy more than a few minutes."

"He is very busy just now. If it has anything to do with the election"—a local contest was at its height—"he is not interested in politics and scarcely ever votes." Her manner was not curious, but merely reflected a business-like desire to save trouble all round.

"Very sensible, too; ve-ry sensible indeed," almost warbled Mr. Carlyle with instinctive cajolery. "After all," he continued, mendaciously appropriating as his own an aphorism at which he had laughed heartily a few days before in the theatre, "after all, what does an election do but change the colour of the necktie

of the man who picks our pockets? No, no, Mrs. Paulden, it is merely a—um—quite personal matter."

The lady looked from one to the other with smiling amiability.

"Some little mystery," her expression seemed to say. "All right; I don't mind, only perhaps I could help you if I knew."

"Mr. Paulden is in his dark-room now," was what she actually did say. "I am afraid, I am really afraid that I shan't be able to persuade him to come out unless I can take a definite message."

"One understands the difficulty of tempting an enthusiast from his work," suggested Carrados, speaking for the first time. "Would it be permissible to take us to the door of the dark-room, Mrs. Paulden, and let us speak to your husband through it?"

"We can try that way," she acquiesced readily, "if it is really so important."

"I think so," he replied.

The dark-room lay across the hall. Mrs. Paulden conducted them to the door, waited a moment, and then knocked quietly.

"Yes?" sang out a voice, rather irritably one might judge, from inside.

"Two gentlemen have called to see you about something, Lance——"

"I cannot see anyone when I am in here," interrupted the voice with rising sharpness. "You know that, Clara——"

"Yes, dear," she said soothingly, "but listen. They are at the door here and if you can spare the time just to come and speak you will know without much trouble if their business is as important as they think."

"Wait a minute," came the reply after a moment's pause, and then they heard someone approach the door from the other side.

It was a little difficult to know exactly how it happened in the obscure light of that corner of the hall. Carrados had stepped nearer to the door to speak. Possibly he trod on Mr. Carlyle's toe, for there was a confused movement; certainly he put out his hand hastily to recover himself. The next moment the door of the dark-room jerked open, the light was let in and the warm odours of a mixed and vitiated atmosphere rolled out. Secure in the well-ordered discipline of his excellent household, Mr. Paulden had neglected the precaution of locking himself in.

"Confound it all!" shouted the incensed experimenter in a towering rage; "confound it all, you've spoiled the whole thing now!"

"Dear me," apologised Carrados pentitently, "I am so sorry. I think it must have been my fault, do you know. Does it really matter?"

"Matter!" stormed Mr. Paulden, recklessly flinging open the door fully now to come face to face with his disturbers—"matter letting a flood of light into a dark-room in the middle of a delicate experiment!"

"Surely it was very little," persisted Carrados.

"Pshaw," snarled the angry photographer, "it was enough. You know the difference between light and dark, I suppose?"

Mr. Carlyle suddenly found himself holding his breath, wondering how on earth Max had conjured that opportune challenge to the surface.

"No," was the mild and deprecating reply—the appeal *ad misericordiam* that had never failed him yet—"no, unfortunately I don't, for I am blind. That is why I am so awkward."

Out of the shocked silence Mrs. Paulden gave a little croon of pity. The moment before she had been speechless with indignation on her husband's behalf. Paulden felt as though he had struck a suffering animal. He stammered an apology and turned away to close the unfortunate door. Then he began to walk slowly down the hall.

"You wished to see me about something?" he remarked, with matter-of-fact civility. "Perhaps we had better go in here." He indicated the reception-room where they had waited and followed them in. The admirable Mrs. Paulden gave no indication of wishing to join the party.

Carrados came to the point at once.

"Mr. Carlyle," he said, indicating his friend, "has recently been acting for the prosecution in a case of alleged poisoning that the Public Prosecutor has now taken up. I am interested in the defence. Both sides are thus before you, Mr. Paulden."

"How does this concern me?" asked Paulden with obvious surprise.

"You are experimenting with bhurine. The victim of this alleged crime undoubtedly lost his life by bhurine poisoning. Do you mind telling us when and where you acquired your stock of this scarce substance?"

"I have had——"

"No—a moment, Mr. Paulden, before you reply," struck in Carrados with a warning gesture. "You must understand that nothing so grotesque as to connect you with a crime is contem-

plated. But a man is under arrest and the chief point against him is the half-ounce of bhurine that Lightcraft of Trenion Street sold to someone at half-past five last Wednesday fortnight. Before you commit yourself to any statement that it may possibly be difficult to recede from, you should realise that this inquiry will be pushed to the very end."

"How do you know that I am using bhurine?"

"That," parried Carrados, "is a blind man's secret."

"Oh, well. And you say that someone has been arrested through this fact?"

"Yes. Possibly you have read something of the St. Abbots mushroom poisoning case?"

"I have no interest in the sensational ephemera of the Press. Very well; it was I who bought the bhurine from Lightcraft that Wednesday afternoon. I gave a false name and address, I must admit. I had a sufficient private reason for so doing."

"This knocks what is vulgarly termed 'the stuffing' out of the case for the prosecution," observed Carlyle, who had been taking a note. "It may also involve you in some trouble yourself, Mr. Paulden."

"I don't think that he need regard that very seriously in the circumstances," said Carrados reassuringly.

"They must find some scapegoat, you know," persisted Mr. Carlyle. "Loudham will raise Cain over it."

"I don't think so. Loudham, as the prosecution will roundly tell him, has only himself to thank for not giving a satisfactory account of his movements. Loudham will be lectured, Lightcraft will be fined the minimum, and Mr. Paulden will, I imagine, be virtuously told not to do it again."

The man before them laughed bitterly.

"There will be no occasion to do it again," he said. "Do you know anything of the circumstances?"

"Lightcraft told us something connected with colour-photography. You distrust Mr. Lightcraft, I infer?"

Mr. Paulden came down to the heart-easing medium of the street.

"I've had some once, thanks," was what he said with terse expression. "Let me tell you. About eighteen months ago I was on the edge of a great discovery in colour-photography. It was my discovery, whatever you may have heard. Bhurine was the medium, and not being then so cautious or so suspicious as I have reason to be now, and finding it difficult—really impossible—to

procure this substance casually, I sent in an order to Lightcraft to procure me a stock. Unfortunately, in a moment of enthusiasm I had hinted at the anticipated results to a man who was then my friend—a weakling called Southem. Comparing notes with Lightcraft they put two and two together and in a trice most of the secret boiled over.

"If you have ever been within an ace of a monumental discovery you will understand the torment of anxiety and self-reproach that possessed me. For months the result must have trembled in the balance, but even as it evaded me so it evaded the others. And at last I was able to spread conviction that the bhurine process was a failure. I breathed again.

"You don't want to hear of the various things that conspired to baffle me. I proceeded with extreme caution and therefore slowly. About two weeks ago I had another foretaste of success and immediately on it a veritable disaster. By some diabolical mischance I contrived to upset my stock bottle of bhurine. It rolled down, smashed to atoms on a developing dish filled with another chemical, and the precious lot was irretrievably lost. To arrest the experiments at that stage even for a day was to waste a month. In one place and one alone could I hope to replenish the stock temporarily at such short notice and to do it openly after my last experience filled me with dismay. . . . Well, you know what happened, and now, I suppose, it will all come out."

VI

A week after his arrest Philip Loudham and his sister were sitting in the drawing-room at Hazlehurst, nervous and expectant. Loudham had been discharged scarcely six hours before, with such vindication of his character as the frigid intimation that there was no evidence against him afforded. On his arrival home he had found a letter from Max Carrados—a name with which he was now familiar—awaiting him. There had been other notes and telegrams—messages of sympathy and congratulation, but the man who had brought about his liberation did not include these conventionalities. He merely stated that he purposed calling upon Mr. Loudham at nine o'clock that evening and that he hoped it would be convenient for him and all other members of the household to be at home.

"He can scarcely be coming to be thanked," speculated Loudham, breaking the silence that had fallen on them as the hour approached. "I should have called on him myself to-morrow."

Mrs. Dupreen assented absent-mindedly. Both were dressed in black, and both at that moment had the same thought: that they were dreaming this.

"I suppose you won't go on living here, Irene?" continued the brother, speaking to make the minutes seem tolerable.

This at least had the effect of bringing Mrs. Dupreen back into the present with a rush.

"Of course not," she replied almost sharply and looking at him direct. "Why should I, now?"

"Oh, all right," he agreed. "I didn't suppose you would." Then, as the front-door bell was heard to ring: "Thank heaven!"

"Won't you go to meet him in the hall and bring him in?" suggested Mrs. Dupreen. "He is blind, you know."

Carrados was carrying a small leather case which he allowed Loudham to relieve him of, together with his hat and gloves. The introduction to Mrs. Dupreen was made, the blind man put in touch with a chair, and then Philip Loudham began to rattle off the acknowledgment of gratitude of which he had been framing and rejecting openings for the last half-hour.

"I'm afraid it's no good attempting to thank you for the extraordinary service that you've rendered me, Mr. Carrados," he began, "and, above all I appreciate the fact that, owing to you, it has been possible to keep Mrs. Guestling's name entirely out of the case. Of course you know all about that, and my sister knows, so it isn't worth while beating about the bush. Well, now that I shall have something like a decent income of my own, I shall urge Kitty—Mrs. Guestling—to apply for the divorce that she is richly entitled to, and when that is all settled we shall marry at once and try to forget the experience on both sides that has led up to it. I hope," he added tamely, "that you don't consider us really much to blame?"

Carrados shook his head in mild deprecation.

"That is an ethical point that has lain outside the scope of my inquiry," he replied. "You would hardly imagine that I should disturb you at such a time merely to claim your thanks. Has it occurred to you why I should have come?"

Brother and sister exchanged looks and by their silence gave reply.

"We have still to find who poisoned Charlie Winpole."

Loudham stared at their guest in frank bewilderment, Mrs. Dupreen almost closed her eyes. When she spoke it was in a pained whisper.

"Is there anything more to be gained by pursuing that idea, Mr. Carrados?" she asked pleadingly. "We have passed through a week of anguish, coming on a week of grief and great distress. Surely all has been done that can be done?"

"But you would have justice for your nephew if there has been foul play?"

Mrs. Dupreen made a weary gesture of resignation. It was Loudham who took up the question.

"Do you really mean, Mr. Carrados, that there is any doubt about the cause?"

"Will you give me my case please? Thank you." He opened it and produced a small paper bag. "Now a newspaper, if you will." He opened the bag and poured out the contents. "You remember stating at the inquest, Mrs. Dupreen, that the mushrooms you bought looked rather dry? They were dry, there is no doubt, for they had been gathered four days. Here are some more under precisely the same conditions. They looked, in point of fact, like these?"

"Yes," admitted the lady, beginning to regard Carrados with a new and curious interest.

"Dr. Slark further stated that the only fungus containing the poison bhurine—the *Amanita* called the Black Cap, and also by the country folk the Devil's Scent Bottle—did not assume its forbidding appearance until maturity. He was wrong in one sense there, for experiment proves that if the Black Cap is gathered in its young and deceptive stage and kept, it assumes precisely the same appearance as it withers as if it was ripening naturally. You observe." He opened a second bag and, shaking out the contents, displayed another little heap by the side of the first. "Gathered four days ago," he explained.

"Why, they are as black as ink," commented Loudham. "And the, phew! aroma!"

"One would hardly have got through without you seeing it, Mrs. Dupreen?"

"I certainly hardly think so," she admitted.

"With due allowance for Lackington's biased opinion I also think that his claim might be allowed. Finally, it is incredible that whoever peeled the mushrooms should have passed one of these. Who was the cook on that occasion, Mrs. Dupreen?"

"My maid Hilda. She does all the cooking."

"The one who admitted me?"

"Yes; she is the only servant I have, Mr. Carrados."

"I should like to have her in, if you don't mind."

"Certainly, if you wish it. She is"—Mrs. Dupreen felt that she must put in a favourable word before this inexorable man pronounced judgment—"she is a very good, straightforward girl."

"So much the better."

"I will——" Mrs. Dupreen rose and began to cross the room.

"Ring for her? Thank you," and whatever her intention had been the lady rang the bell.

"Yes, ma'am?"

A neat, modest-mannered girl, simple and nervous, with a face as full, as clear and as honest as an English apple. "A pity," thought Mrs. Dupreen, "that this confident, suspicious man cannot see her now."

"Come in, Hilda. This gentleman wants to ask you something."

"Yes, ma'am." The round, blue eyes went appealingly to Carrados, fell upon the fungi spread out before her, and then circled the room with an instinct of escape.

"You remember the night poor Charlie died, Hilda," said Carrados in his suavest tone, "you cooked some mushrooms for his supper, didn't you?"

"No, sir," came the glib reply.

"'No,' Hilda!" exclaimed Mrs. Dupreen in wonderment. "You mean 'yes,' surely, child. Of course you cooked them. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, ma'am," dutifully replied Hilda.

"That is all right," said the blind man reassuringly. "Nervous witnesses very often answer at random at first. You have nothing to be afraid of, my good girl, if you will tell the truth. I suppose you know a mushroom when you see it?"

"Yes, sir," was the rather hesitating reply.

"There was nothing like this among them?" He held up one of the poisonous sort.

"No, sir; indeed there wasn't, sir. I should have known then."

"You would have known *then*? You were not called at the inquest, Hilda?"

"No, sir."

"If you had been, what would you have told them about these mushrooms that you cooked?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Come, come, Hilda. What could you have told them—something that we do not know? The truth, girl, if you want to save yourself!" Then with a sudden, terrible directness the question

cleft her trembling, guilt-stricken little brain: "Where did you get the other mushrooms from that you put with those that your mistress brought?"

The eyes that had been mostly riveted to the floor leapt to Carrados for a single frightened glance, from Carrados to her mistress, to Philip Loudham, and to the floor again. In a moment her face changed and she was in a burst of sobbing.

"Oho, oho, oho!" she wailed. "I didn't know; I didn't know. I meant no harm. Indeed, I didn't, ma'am."

"Hilda! Hilda!" exclaimed Mrs. Dupreen in bewilderment. "What is it you're saying? What have you done?"

"It was his own fault. Oho, oho, oho!" Every word was punctuated by a gasp. "He always was a little pig and making himself ill with food. You know he was, ma'am, although you were so fond of him. I'm sure I'm not to blame."

"But *what* was it? What *have* you done?" besought her mistress.

"It was after you went out that afternoon. He put on his things and slipped down into the kitchen without the master knowing. He said what you were getting for his dinner, ma'am, and that you never got enough of them. Then he asked me not to tell about his being down, because he'd seen some white things from his bedroom window growing by the hedge at the bottom of the garden and he was going to get them. He brought in four or five and said they were mushrooms all right and would I cook them with the others and not say anything because you'd only say too many weren't good for him if you knew. And I didn't know any difference. Indeed I'm telling you the truth, ma'am."

"Oh, Hilda, Hilda!" was torn reproachfully from Mrs. Dupreen. "You know what we've gone through. Why didn't you tell us this before?"

"I was afraid. I was afraid of what they'd do. And no one ever guessed until I thought I was safe. Indeed I meant no harm to anyone, but I was afraid that they'd punish me instead."

Carrados had risen and was picking up his things.

"Yes," he said, half musing to himself, "I knew it must exist: the one explanation that accounts for everything and cannot be assailed. We have reached the bed-rock of truth at last."

Agatha Christie

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CLAPHAM COOK

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At the time that I was sharing rooms with my friend Hercule Poirot, it was my custom to read aloud to him the headlines in the morning newspaper, *The Daily Blare.*

The Daily Blare was a paper that made the most of any opportunity for sensationalism. Robberies and murders did not lurk obscurely in its back pages. Instead they hit you in the eye in large type on the front page.

Absconding Bank Clerk Disappears with Fifty Thousand Pounds Worth of Negotiable Securities, I read.

Husband Puts his Head in Gas-oven. Unhappy Home Life. Missing Typist. Pretty Girl of Twenty-One. Where is Edna Field?

"There you are, Poirot, plenty to choose from. An absconding bank clerk, a mysterious suicide, a missing typist—which will you have?"

My friend was in a placid mood. He quietly shook his head.

"I am not greatly attracted to any of them, *mon ami.* To-day I feel inclined for the life of ease. It would have to be a very interesting problem to tempt me from my chair. See you, I have affairs of importance of my own to attend to."

"Such as?"

"My wardrobe, Hastings. If I mistake not, there is on my new grey suit the spot of grease—only the unique spot, but it is sufficient to trouble me. Then there is my winter overcoat—I must lay him aside in the powder of Keatings. And I think—yes, I think—the moment is ripe for the trimmings of my moustaches—and afterwards I must apply the *pommade.*"

"Well," I said, strolling to the window, "I doubt if you'll be able to carry out this delirious programme. That was a ring at the bell. You have a client."

"Unless the affair is one of national importance, I touch it not," declared Poirot with dignity.

A moment later our privacy was invaded by a stout red-faced lady who panted audibly as a result of her rapid ascent of the stairs.

"You're M. Poirot?" she demanded, as she sank into a chair.

"I am Hercule Poirot, yes, Madame."

"You're not a bit like what I thought you'd be," said the lady, eyeing him with some disfavour. "Did you pay for the bit in the paper saying what a clever detective you were, or did they put it in themselves?"

"Madame!" said Poirot, drawing himself up.

"I'm sorry, I'm sure, but you know what these papers are nowadays. You begin reading a nice article 'What a bride said to her plain unmarried friend,' and it's all about a simple thing you buy at the chemist's and shampoo your hair with. Nothing but puff. But no offence taken, I hope? I'll tell you what I want you to do for me. I want you to find my cook."

Poirot stared at her; for once his ready tongue failed him. I turned aside to hide the broadening smile I could not control.

"It's all this wicked dole," continued the lady. "Putting ideas into servants' heads, wanting to be typists and what nots. Stop the dole, that's what I say. I'd like to know what *my* servants have to complain of—afternoon and evening off a week, alternate Sundays, washing put out, same food as we have—and never a bit of margarine in the house, nothing but the very best butter."

She paused for want of breath and Poirot seized his opportunity. He spoke in his haughtiest manner rising to his feet as he did so.

"I fear you are making a mistake, Madame. I am not holding an inquiry into the conditions of domestic service. I am a private detective."

"I know that," said our visitor. "Didn't I tell you I wanted you to find my cook for me? Walked out of the house on Wednesday, without so much as a word to me, and never came back."

"I am sorry, Madame, but I do not touch this particular kind of business. I wish you good morning."

Our visitor snorted with indignation.

"That's it, is it, my fine fellow? Too proud, eh? Only deal with Government secrets and Countesses' jewels? Let me tell you a servant's every bit as important as a tiara to a woman in my position. We can't all be fine ladies going out in our motors with our diamonds and our pearls. A good cook's a good cook—and when you lose her, it's as much to you as her pearls are to some fine lady."

For a moment or two it appeared to be a toss up between

Poirot's dignity and his sense of humour. Finally he laughed and sat down again.

"Madame, you are in the right, and I am in the wrong. Your remarks are just and intelligent. This case will be a novelty. Never yet have I hunted a missing domestic. Truly here is the problem of national importance that I was demanding of fate just before your arrival. *En avant!* You say this jewel of a cook went out on Wednesday and did not return. That is the day before yesterday."

"Yes, it was her day out."

"But probably, Madame, she has met with some accident. Have you inquired at any of the hospitals?"

"That's exactly what I thought yesterday, but this morning, if you please, she sent for her box. And not so much as a line to me! If I'd been at home, I'd not have let it go—treating me like that! But I'd just stepped out to the butcher."

"Will you describe her to me?"

"She was middle-aged, stout, black hair turning grey—most respectable. She'd been ten years in her last place. Eliza Dunn, her name was."

"And you had had—no disagreement with her on the Wednesday?"

"None whatever. That's what makes it all so queer."

"How many servants do you keep, Madame?"

"Two. The house-parlourmaid, Annie, is a very nice girl. A bit forgetful and her head full of young men, but a good servant if you keep her up to her work."

"Did she and the cook get on well together?"

"They had their ups and downs, of course—but on the whole, very well."

"And the girl can throw no light on the mystery?"

"She says not—but you know what servants are—they all hang together."

"Well, well, we must look into this. Where did you say you resided, Madame?"

"At Clapham; 88 Prince Albert Road."

"Bien, Madame, I will wish you good morning, and you may count upon seeing me at your residence during the course of the day."

Mrs. Todd, for such was our new friend's name, then took her departure. Poirot looked at me somewhat ruefully.

"Well, well, Hastings, this is a novel affair that we have here.

The Disappearance of the Clapham Cook! Never, *never,* must our friend Inspector Japp get to hear of this!"

He then proceeded to heat an iron and carefully removed the grease spot from his grey suit by means of a piece of blotting-paper. His moustaches he regretfully postponed to another day, and we set out for Clapham.

Prince Albert Road proved to be a street of small prim houses, all exactly alike, with neat lace curtains veiling the windows, and well polished brass knockers on the doors.

We rang the bell at No. 88, and the door was opened by a neat maid with a pretty face. Mrs. Todd came out in the hall to greet us.

"Don't go, Annie," she cried. "This gentleman's a detective and he'll want to ask you some questions."

Annie's face displayed a struggle between alarm and a pleasurable excitement.

"I thank you, Madame," said Poirot bowing. "I would like to question your maid now—and to see her alone, if I may."

We were shown into a small drawing-room, and when Mrs. Todd, with obvious reluctance, had left the room, Poirot commenced his cross-examination.

"Voyons, Mademoiselle Annie, all that you shall tell us will be of the greatest importance. You alone can shed any light on the case. Without your assistance I can do nothing."

The alarm vanished from the girl's face and the pleasurable excitement became more strongly marked.

"I'm sure, sir," she said, "I'll tell you anything I can."

"That is good," Poirot beamed approval on her. "Now, first of all what is your own idea? You are a girl of remarkable intelligence. That can be seen at once! What is your own explanation of Eliza's disappearance?"

Thus encouraged, Annie fairly flowed into excited speech.

"White Slavers, sir, I've said so all along! Cook was always warning me against them. *'Don't you sniff no scent, or eat any sweets—no matter how gentlemanly the fellow!'* Those were her words to me. And now they've got her! I'm sure of it. As likely as not, she's been shipped to Turkey or one of them Eastern places where I've heard they like them fat!"

Poirot preserved an admirable gravity.

"But in that case—and it is indeed an idea!—would she have sent for her trunk?"

"Well, I don't know, sir. She'd want her things—even in those foreign places."

"Who came for the trunk—a man?"

"It was Carter Paterson, sir."

"Did you pack it?"

"No, sir, it was already packed and corded."

"Ah! that's interesting. That shows that when she left the house on Wednesday, she had already determined not to return. You see that, do you not?"

"Yes, sir." Annie looked slightly taken aback. "I hadn't thought of that. But it might still have been White Slavers, mightn't it, sir?" she added wistfully.

"Undoubtedly!" said Poirot gravely. He went on: "Did you both occupy the same bedroom?"

"No, sir, we had separate rooms."

"And had Eliza expressed any dissatisfaction with her present post to you at all? Were you both happy here?"

"She'd never mentioned leaving. The place is all right——" The girl hesitated.

"Speak freely," said Poirot kindly. "I shall not tell your mistress."

"Well, of course, sir, she's a caution, Missus is. But the food's good. Plenty of it, and no stinting. Something hot for supper, good outings, and as much frying-fat as you like. And anyway, if Eliza did want to make a change, she'd never have gone off this way, I'm sure. She'd have stayed her month. Why, Missus could have a month's wages out of her for doing this!"

"And the work, it is not too hard?"

"Well, she's particular—always poking round in corners and looking for dust. And then there's the lodger, or paying guest as he's always called. But that's only breakfast and dinner, same as Master. They're out all day in the City."

"You like your master?"

"He's all right—very quiet and a bit on the stingy side."

"You can't remember, I suppose, the last thing Eliza said before she went out?"

"Yes, I can. 'If there's any stewed peaches over from the dining-room,' she says, 'we'll have them for supper, and a bit of bacon and some fried potatoes.' Mad over stewed peaches, she was. I shouldn't wonder if they didn't get her that way."

"Was Wednesday her regular day out?"

"Yes, she had Wednesdays and I had Thursdays."

Poirot asked a few more questions, then declared himself satisfied. Annie departed, and Mrs. Todd hurried in, her face alight with curiosity. She had, I felt certain, bitterly resented her exclusion from the room during our conversation with Annie. Poirot, however, was careful to soothe her feelings tactfully.

"It is difficult," he explained, "for a woman of exceptional intelligence such as yourself, Madame, to bear patiently the roundabout methods we poor detectives are forced to use. To have patience with stupidity is difficult for the quick witted."

Having thus charmed away any little resentment on Mrs. Todd's part, he brought the conversation round to her husband and elicited the information that he worked with a firm in the City and would not be home until after six.

"Doubtless he is very disturbed and worried by this unaccountable business, Eh? Is it not so?"

"He's never worried," declared Mrs. Todd. *'Well, well, get another, my dear.'* That's all *he* said! He's so calm that it drives me to distraction sometimes. *'An ungrateful woman,'* he said. *'We are well rid of her.'"*

"What about the other inmates of the house, Madame?"

"You mean Mr. Simpson, our paying guest? Well, as long as he gets his breakfast and his evening meal all right, *he* doesn't worry."

"What is his profession, Madame?"

"He works in a bank." She mentioned its name, and I started slightly, remembering my perusal of *The Daily Blare.*

"A young man?"

"Twenty-eight, I believe. Nice quiet young fellow."

"I should like to have a few words with him, and also with your husband, if I may. I will return for that purpose this evening. I venture to suggest that you should repose yourself a little, Madame, you look fatigued."

"I should just think I am! First the worry about Eliza, and then I was at the Sales practically all yesterday, and you know what *that* is, Mr. Poirot, and what with one thing and another and a lot to do in the house, because of course Annie can't do it all—and very likely she'll give notice anyway, being unsettled in this way—well, what with it all, I'm tired out!"

Poirot murmured sympathetically, and we took our leave.

"It's a curious coincidence," I said, "but that absconding clerk, Davis, was from the same bank as Simpson. Can there be any connection, do you think?"

Poirot smiled.

"At the one end, a defaulting clerk, at the other a vanishing cook. It is hard to see any relation between the two, unless possibly Davis visited Simpson, fell in love with the cook, and persuaded her to accompany him on his flight!"

I laughed. But Poirot remained grave.

"He might have done worse," he said reprovingly. "Remember, Hastings, if you are going into exile, a good cook may be of more comfort than a pretty face!" He paused for a moment and then went on. "It is a curious case, full of contradictory features. I am interested—yes, I am distinctly interested."

That evening we returned to 88 Prince Albert Road and interviewed both Todd and Simpson. The former was a melancholy lantern-jawed man of forty odd.

"Oh! yes, yes," he said vaguely. "Eliza. Yes. A good cook, I believe. And economical. I make a strong point of economy."

"Can you imagine any reason for her leaving you so suddenly?"

"Oh! well," said Mr. Todd vaguely. "Servants, you know. My wife worries too much. Worn out from always worrying. The whole problem's quite simple really. 'Get another, my dear,' I say. 'Get another.' That's all there is to it. No good crying over spilt milk."

Mr. Simpson was equally unhelpful. He was a quiet inconspicuous young man with spectacles.

"I must have seen her, I suppose," he said. "Elderly woman, wasn't she? Of course, it's the other one I see always, Annie. Nice girl. Very obliging."

"Were those two on good terms with each other?"

Mr. Simpson said he couldn't say, he was sure. He supposed so.

"Well, we get nothing of interest there, *mon ami,*" said Poirot as we left the house. Our departure had been delayed by a burst of vociferous repetition from Mrs. Todd, who repeated everything she had said that morning at rather greater length.

"Are you disappointed?" I asked. "Did you expect to hear something?"

Poirot shook his head.

"There was a possibility, of course," he said. "But I hardly thought it likely."

The next development was a letter which Poirot received on

the following morning. He read it, turned purple with indignation, and handed it to me.

"Mrs. Todd regrets that after all she will not avail herself of Mr. Poirot's services. After talking the matter over with her husband she sees that it is foolish to call in a detective about a purely domestic affair. Mrs. Todd encloses a guinea for consultation fee."

"Aha!" cried Poirot angrily. "And they think to get rid of Hercule Poirot like that! As a favour—a great favour—I consent to investigate their miserable little twopenny halfpenny affair—and they dismiss me *comme ca!* Here, I mistake not, is the hand of Mr. Todd. But I say—No!—thirty-six times no! I will spend my own guineas, thirty-six hundred of them if need be, but I will get to the bottom of this matter!"

"Yes," I said. "But how?"

Poirot calmed down a little.

"D'abord," he said, "we will advertise in the papers. Let me see—yes—something like this:

"'If Eliza Dunn will communicate with this address, she will hear of something to her advantage.' Put it in all the papers you can think of, Hastings. Then I will make some little inquiries of my own. Go, go—all must be done as quickly as possible!"

I did not see him again until the evening, when he condescended to tell me what he had been doing.

"I have made inquiries at the firm of Mr. Todd. He was not absent on Wednesday, and he bears a good character—so much for him. Then Simpson, on Thursday he was ill and did not come to the bank, but he was there on Wednesday. He was moderately friendly with Davis. Nothing out of the common. There does not seem to be anything there. No. We must place our reliance on the advertisement."

The advertisement duly appeared in all the principal daily papers. By Poirot's orders it was to be continued every day for a week. His eagerness over this uninteresting matter of a defaulting cook was extraordinary, but I realised that he considered it a point of honour to persevere until he finally succeeded. Several extremely interesting cases were brought to him about this time, but he declined them all. Every morning he would rush at his letters, scrutinise them earnestly and then lay them down with a sigh.

But our patience was rewarded at last. On the Wednesday fol-

lowing Mrs. Todd's visit, our landlady informed us that a person of the name of Eliza Dunn had called.

"Enfin!" cried Poirot. "But make her mount then! At once. Immediately."

Thus admonished, our landlady hurried out and returned a moment or two later, ushering in Miss Dunn. Our quarry was much as described: tall, stout, and eminently respectable.

"I came in answer to the advertisement," she explained. "I thought there must be some muddle or other, and that perhaps you didn't know I'd already got my legacy."

Poirot was studying her attentively. He drew forward a chair with a flourish.

"The truth of the matter is," he explained. "That your late mistress, Mrs. Todd, was much concerned about you. She feared some accident might have befallen you."

Eliza Dunn seemed very much surprised.

"Didn't she get my letter then?"

"She got no word of any kind." He paused, and then said persuasively: "Recount to me the whole story, will you not?"

Eliza Dunn needed no encouragement. She plunged at once into a lengthy narrative.

"I was just coming home on Wednesday night and had nearly got to the house, when a gentleman stopped me. A tall gentleman he was, with a beard and a big hat. 'Miss Eliza Dunn?' he said. 'Yes,' I said. 'I've been inquiring for you at No. 88,' he said. 'They told me I might meet you coming along here. Miss Dunn, I have come from Australia specially to find you. Do you happen to know the maiden name of your maternal grandmother?' 'Jane Emmott,' I said. 'Exactly,' he said. 'Now, Miss Dunn, although you may never have heard of the fact, your grandmother had a great friend, Eliza Leech. This friend went to Australia where she married a very wealthy settler. Her two children died in infancy, and she inherited all her husband's property. She died a few months ago, and by her will you inherit a house in this country and a considerable sum of money.'

"You could have knocked me down with a feather," continued Miss Dunn. "For a minute, I was suspicious, and he must have seen it, for he smiled. 'Quite right to be on your guard, Miss Dunn,' he said. 'Here are my credentials.' He handed me a letter from some lawyers in Melbourne, Hurst and Crotchet, and a card. He was Mr. Crotchet. 'There are one or two conditions,' he said. 'Our client was a little eccentric, you know. The bequest is con-

ditional on your taking possession of the house (it is in Cumberland) before twelve o'clock to-morrow. The other condition is of no importance—it is merely a stipulation that you should not be in domestic service.' My face fell. 'Oh! Mr. Crotchet,' I said. 'I'm a cook. Didn't they tell you at the house?' 'Dear, dear,' he said. 'I had no idea of such a thing. I thought you might possibly be a companion or governess there. This is very unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed.'

"'Shall I have to lose all the money?' I said anxious like. He thought for a minute or two. 'There are always ways of getting round the law, Miss Dunn,' he said at last. 'We lawyers know that. The way out here is for you to have left your employment this afternoon.' 'But my month?' I said. 'My dear Miss Dunn,' he said with a smile. 'You can leave an employer any minute by forfeiting a month's wages. Your mistress will understand in view of the circumstances. The difficulty is *time!* It is imperative that you should catch the 11.5 from King's Cross to the North. I can advance you ten pounds or so for the fare, and you can write a note at the station to your employer. I will take it to her myself and explain the whole circumstances.' I agreed, of course, and an hour later I was in the train, so flustered that I didn't know whether I was on my head or my heels. Indeed by the time I got to Carlisle, I was half inclined to think the whole thing was one of those confidence tricks you read about. But I went to the address he had given me—solicitors they were, and it was all right. A nice little house, and an income of three hundred a year. These lawyers knew very little, they'd just got a letter from a gentleman in London instructing them to hand over the house to me and £150 for the first six months. Mr. Crotchet sent up my things to me, but there was no word from Missus. I supposed she was angry and grudged me my bit of luck. She kept back my box too, and sent my clothes in paper parcels. But there, of course if she never had my letter, she might think it a bit cool of me."

Poirot had listened attentively to this long history. Now he nodded his head as though completely satisfied.

"Thank you, Mademoiselle. There had been, as you say, a little muddle. Permit me to recompense you for your trouble." He handed her an envelope. "You return to Cumberland immediately? A little word in your ear. *Do not forget how to cook.* It is always useful to have something to fall back upon in case things go wrong."

"Credulous," he murmured, as our visitor departed, "but per-

haps not more than most of her class." His face grew grave. "Come, Hastings, there is no time to be lost. Get a taxi while I write a note to Japp."

Poirot was waiting on the doorstep when I returned with the taxi.

"Where are we going?" I asked anxiously.

"First, to despatch this note by special messenger."

This was done and re-entering the taxi Poirot gave the address to the driver.

"Eighty-eight Prince Albert Road, Clapham."

"So we are going there?"

"Mais oui. Though frankly I fear we shall be too late. Our bird will have flown, Hastings."

"Who is our bird?"

Poirot smiled.

"The inconspicuous Mr. Simpson."

"What?" I exclaimed.

"Oh! come now, Hastings, do not tell me that all is not clear to you now?"

"The cook was got out of the way, I realise that," I said, slightly piqued. "But why? *Why* should Simpson wish to get her out of the house? Did she know something about him?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Well, then——"

"But he wanted something that she had."

"Money? The Australian legacy?"

"No, my friend—something quite different." He paused a moment and then said gravely: *"A battered tin trunk. . . ."*

I looked sideways at him. His statement seemed so fantastic that I suspected him of pulling my leg, but he was prefectly grave and serious.

"Seriously he could buy a trunk if he wanted one," I cried.

"He did not want a new trunk. He wanted a trunk of pedigree. A trunk of assured respectability."

"Look here, Poirot," I cried, "this really is a bit thick. You're pulling my leg."

He looked at me.

"You lack the brains and the imagination of Mr. Simpson, Hastings. See here: On Wednesday evening, Simpson decoys away the cook. A printed card and a printed sheet of notepaper are simple matters to obtain, and he is willing to pay £150 and a year's house rent to assure the success of his plan. Miss Dunn

does not recognise him—the beard and the hat and the slight colonial accent completely deceive her. That is the end of Wednesday—except for the trifling fact that Simpson has helped himself to fifty thousand pounds worth of negotiable securities."

"*Simpson*—but it was *Davis*——"

"If you will kindly permit me to continue, Hastings! Simpson knows that the theft will be discovered on Thursday afternoon. He does not go to the bank on Thursday, but he lies in wait for Davis when he comes out to lunch. Perhaps he admits the theft and tells Davis he will return the securities to him—anyhow he succeeds in getting Davis to come to Clapham with him. It is the maid's day out, and Mrs. Todd was at the Sales, so there is no one in the house. When the theft is discovered and Davis is missing, the implication will be overwhelming. Davis is the thief! Mr. Simpson will be perfectly safe, and can return to work on the morrow like the honest clerk they think him."

"And Davis?"

Poirot made an expressive gesture, and slowly shook his head.

"It seems too cold-blooded to be believed, and yet what other explanation can there be, *mon ami*. The one difficulty for a murderer is the disposal of the body—and Simpson had planned that out beforehand. I was struck at once by the fact that although Eliza Dunn obviously meant to return that night when she went out (witness her remark about the stewed peaches) *yet her trunk was all ready packed when they came for it.* It was Simpson who sent word to Carter Paterson to call on Friday and it was Simpson who corded up the box on Thursday afternoon. What suspicion could possibly arise? A maid leaves and sends for her box, it is labelled and addressed ready in her name, probably to a railway station within easy reach of London. On Saturday afternoon, Simpson, in his Australian disguise, claims it, he affixes a new label and address and re-despatches it somewhere else, again 'to be left till called for.' When the authorities get suspicious, for excellent reasons, and open it, all that can be elicited will be that a bearded colonial despatched it from some junction near London. There will be nothing to connect it with 88 Prince Albert Road. Ah! here we are."

Poirot's prognostications had been correct. Simpson had left two days previously. But he was not to escape the consequences of his crime. By the aid of wireless, he was discovered on the *Olympia,* en route to America.

A tin trunk, addressed to Mr. Henry Wintergreen, attracted

the attention of the railway officials at Glasgow. It was opened and found to contain the body of the unfortunate Davis.

Mrs. Todd's cheque for a guinea was never cashed. Instead Poirot had it framed and hung on the wall of our sitting-room.

"It is to me a little reminder, Hastings. Never to despise the trivial—the undignified. A disappearing domestic at one end—a cold-blooded murder at the other. To me, one of the most interesting of my cases."

William Wilkie Collins

THE BITER BIT

From *The Queen of Hearts,* extracted from the Correspondence of the London Police.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE, OF THE DETECTIVE POLICE, TO SERGEANT BULMER OF THE SAME FORCE

LONDON, *4th July, 18—.*

SERGEANT BULMER,—This is to inform you that you are wanted to assist in looking up a case of importance, which will require all the attention of an experienced member of the force. The matter of the robbery on which you are now engaged, you will please to shift over to the young man who brings you this letter. You will tell him all the circumstances of the case, just as they stand; you will put him up to the progress you have made (if any) towards detecting the person or persons by whom the money has been stolen; and you will leave him to make the best he can of the matter now in your hands. He is to have the whole responsibility of the case, and the whole credit of his success, if he brings it to a proper issue.

So much for the orders that I am desired to communicate to you.

A word in your ear, next, about this new man who is to take your place. His name is Matthew Sharpin; and he is to have the chance given him of dashing into our office at a jump—supposing he turns out strong enough to take it. You will naturally ask me how he comes by this privilege. I can only tell you that he has some uncommonly strong interest to back him in certain high

quarters which you and I had better not mention except under our breaths. He has been a lawyer's clerk; and he is wonderfully conceited in his opinion of himself, as well as mean and underhand to look at. According to his own account, he leaves his old trade, and joins ours, of his own free will and preference. You will no more believe that than I do. My notion is, that he has managed to ferret out some private information in connection with the affairs of one of his master's clients, which makes him rather an awkward customer to keep in the office for the future, and which, at the same time, gives him hold enough over his employer to make it dangerous to drive him into a corner by turning him away. I think the giving him this unheard-of chance among us, is, in plain words, pretty much like giving him hush-money to keep him quiet. However that may be, Mr. Matthew Sharpin is to have the case now in your hands; and if he succeeds with it, he pokes his ugly nose into our office, as sure as fate. I put you up to this, Sergeant, so that you may not stand in your own light by giving the new man any cause to complain of you at headquarters, and remain yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, *July 5th, 18—*.

DEAR SIR,—Having now been favoured with the necessary instructions from Sergeant Bulmer, I beg to remind you of certain directions which I have received, relating to the report of my future proceedings which I am to prepare for examination at headquarters.

The object of my writing, and of your examining what I have written, before you send it in to the higher authorities, is, I am informed, to give me, as an untried hand, the benefit of your advice, in case I want it (which I venture to think I shall not) at any stage of my proceedings. As the extraordinary circumstances of the case on which I am now engaged, make it impossible for me to absent myself from the place where the robbery was committed, until I have made some progress towards discovering the thief, I am necessarily precluded from consulting you personally. Hence the necessity of my writing down the various details, which might, perhaps, be better communicated by word of mouth. This, if I am not mistaken, is the position in which we are now placed. I state my own impressions on the

subject, in writing, in order that we may clearly understand each other at the outset; and have the honour to remain, your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN

LONDON, *July 5th, 18—.*

SIR,—You have begun by wasting time, ink, and paper. We both of us perfectly well knew the position we stood in towards each other, when I sent you with my letter to Sergeant Bulmer. There was not the least need to repeat it in writing. Be so good as to employ your pen, in future, on the business actually in hand.

You have now three separate matters on which to write to me. First, You have to draw up a statement of your instructions received from Sergeant Bulmer, in order to show us that nothing has escaped your memory, and that you are thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances of the case which has been entrusted to you. Secondly, You are to inform me what it is you propose to do. Thirdly, You are to report every inch of your progress (if you make any) from day to day, and, if need be, from hour to hour as well. This is *your* duty. As to what *my* duty may be, when I want you to remind me of it, I will write and tell you so. In the meantime, I remain, yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, *6th July, 18—*

SIR,—You are rather an elderly person, and, as such, naturally inclined to be a little jealous of men like me, who are in the prime of their lives and their faculties. Under these circumstances, it is my duty to be considerate towards you, and not to bear too hardly on your small failings. I decline, therefore, altogether, to take offence at the tone of your letter; I give you the full benefit of the natural generosity of my nature; I sponge the very existence of your surly communication out of my memory—in short, Chief Inspector Theakstone, I forgive you, and proceed to business.

My first duty is to draw up a full statement of the instructions I have received from Sergeant Bulmer. Here they are at your service, according to my version of them.

At number 13, Rutherford Street, Soho, there is a stationer's

shop. It is kept by one Mr. Yatman. He is a married man, but has no family. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Yatman, the other inmates in the house are a young single man named Jay, who lodges in the front room on the second floor—a shopman, who sleeps in one of the attics,—and a servant-of-all-work, whose bed is in the back-kitchen. Once a week a charwoman comes for a few hours in the morning only, to help this servant. These are all the persons who, on ordinary occasions, have means of access to the interior of the house, placed, as a matter of course, at their disposal.

Mr. Yatman has been in business for many years, carrying on his affairs prosperously enough to realise a handsome independence for a person in his position. Unfortunately for himself, he endeavoured to increase the amount of his property by speculating. He ventured boldly in his investments, luck went against him, and rather less than two years ago he found himself a poor man again. All that was saved out of the wreck of his property was the sum of two hundred pounds.

Although Mr. Yatman did his best to meet his altered circumstances, by giving up many of the luxuries and comforts to which he and his wife had been accustomed, he found it impossible to retrench so far as to allow of putting by any money from the income produced by his shop. The business has been declining of late years—the cheap advertising stationers having done it injury with the public. Consequently, up to the last week the only surplus property possessed by Mr. Yatman consisted of the two hundred pounds which had been recovered from the wreck of his fortune. This sum was placed as a deposit in a joint-stock bank of the highest possible character.

Eight days ago, Mr. Yatman and his lodger, Mr. Jay, held a conversation on the subject of the commercial difficulties which are hampering trade in all directions at the present time. Mr. Jay (who lives by supplying the newspapers with short paragraphs relating to accidents, offences, and brief records of remarkable occurrences in general—who is, in short, what they call a penny-a-liner) told his landlord that he had been in the city that day, and had heard unfavourable rumours on the subject of the joint-stock banks. The rumours to which he alluded had already reached the ears of Mr. Yatman from other quarters; and the confirmation of them by his lodger had such an effect on his mind —predisposed as it was to alarm by the experience of his former losses—that he resolved to go at once to the bank and withdraw his deposit.

It was then getting on towards the end of the afternoon; and he arrived just in time to receive his money before the bank closed.

He received the deposit in bank-notes of the following amounts;—one fifty-pound note, three twenty-pound notes, six ten-pound notes, and six five-pound notes. His object in drawing the money in this form was to have it ready to lay out immediately in trifling loans, on good security, among the small tradespeople of his district, some of whom are sorely pressed for the very means of existence at the present time. Investments of this kind seemed to Mr. Yatman to be the most safe and the most profitable on which he could now venture.

He brought the money back in an envelope placed in his breast-pocket; and asked his shopman, on getting home, to look for a small flat tin cash-box, which had not been used for years, and which, as Mr. Yatman remembered it, was exactly of the right size to hold the bank-notes. For some time the cash-box was searched for in vain. Mr. Yatman called to his wife to know if she had any idea where it was. The question was overheard by the servant-of-all-work, who was taking up the tea-tray at the time, and by Mr. Jay, who was coming down stairs on his way out to the theatre. Ultimately the cash-box was found by the shopman. Mr. Yatman placed the bank-notes in it, secured them by a padlock, and put the box in his coat-pocket. It stuck out of the coat-pocket a very little, but enough to be seen. Mr. Yatman remained at home, up stairs, all the evening. No visitors called. At eleven o'clock he went to bed, and put the cash-box along with his clothes, on a chair by the bed-side.

When he and his wife woke the next morning, the box was gone. Payment of the notes was immediately stopped at the bank of England; but no news of the money has been heard of since that time.

So far, the circumstances of the case are perfectly clear. They point unmistakably to the conclusion that the robbery must have been committed by some person living in the house. Suspicion falls, therefore, upon the servant-of-all-work, upon the shopman, and upon Mr. Jay. The two first knew that the cash-box was being inquired for by their master, but did not know what it was he wanted to put into it. They would assume, of course that it was money. They both had opportunities (the servant, when she took away the tea—and the shopman, when he came, after shut-

ting up, to give the keys of the till to his master) of seeing the cash-box in Mr. Yatman's pocket, and of inferring naturally, from its position there, that he intended to take it into his bedroom with him at night.

Mr. Jay, on the other hand, had been told, during the afternoon's conversation on the subject of joint-stock banks, that his landlord had a deposit of two hundred pounds in one of them. He also knew that Mr. Yatman left him with the intention of drawing that money out; and he heard the inquiry for the cash-box, afterwards, when he was coming down stairs. He must, therefore, have inferred that the money was in the house, and that the cash-box was the receptacle intended to contain it. That he could have had any idea, however, of the place in which Mr. Yatman intended to keep it for the night, is impossible, seeing that he went out before the box was found, and did not return till his landlord was in bed. Consequently, if he committed the robbery, he must have gone into the bedroom purely on speculation.

Speaking of the bedroom reminds me of the necessity of noticing the situation of it in the house, and the means that exist of gaining easy access to it at any hour of the night.

The room in question is the back-room on the first-floor. In consequence of Mrs. Yatman's constitutional nervousness on the subject of fire (which makes her apprehend being burnt alive in her room, in case of accident, by the hampering of the lock if the key is turned in it) her husband has never been accustomed to lock the bedroom door. Both he and his wife are, by their own admission, heavy sleepers. Consequently the risk to be run by any evil-disposed persons wishing to plunder the bedroom, was of the most trifling kind. They could enter the room by merely turning the handle of the door; and if they moved with ordinary caution, there was no fear of their waking the sleepers inside. This fact is of importance. It strengthens our conviction that the money must have been taken by one of the inmates of the house, because it tends to show that the robbery, in this case, might have been committed by persons not possessed of the superior vigilance and cunning of the experienced thief.

Such are the circumstances, as they were related to Sergeant Bulmer, when he was first called in to discover the guilty parties, and, if possible, to recover the lost bank-notes. The strictest inquiry which he could institute, failed of producing the smallest fragment of evidence against any of the persons on whom sus-

picion naturally fell. Their language and behaviour, on being informed of the robbery, was perfectly consistent with the language and behaviour of innocent people. Sergeant Bulmer felt from the first that this was a case for private inquiry and secret observation. He began by recommending Mr. and Mrs. Yatman to affect a feeling of perfect confidence in the innocence of the persons living under their roof; and he then opened the campaign by employing himself in following the goings and comings, and in discovering the friends, the habits, and the secrets of the maid-of-all-work.

Three days and nights of exertion on his own part, and on that of others who were competent to assist his investigations, were enough to satisfy him that there was no sound cause for suspicion against the girl.

He next practised the same precaution in relation to the shopman. There was more difficulty and uncertainty in privately clearing up this person's character without his knowledge, but the obstacles were at last smoothed away with tolerable success; and though there is not the same amount of certainty, in this case, which there was in that of the girl, there is still fair reason for supposing that the shopman has had nothing to do with the robbery of the cash-box.

As a necessary consequence of these proceedings, the range of suspicion now becomes limited to the lodger, Mr. Jay.

When I presented your letter of introduction to Sergeant Bulmer, he had already made some inquiries on the subject of this young man. The result, so far, has not been at all favourable. Mr. Jay's habits are irregular; he frequents public houses, and seems to be familiarly acquainted with a great many dissolute characters; he is in debt to most of the tradespeople whom he employs; he has not paid his rent to Mr. Yatman for the last month; yesterday evening he came home excited by liquor, and last week he was seen talking to a prize-fighter. In short, though Mr. Jay does call himself a journalist, in virtue of his penny-a-line contributions to the newspapers, he is a young man of low tastes, vulgar manners, and bad habits. Nothing has yet been discovered in relation to him, which redounds to his credit in the smallest degree.

I have now reported, down to the very last details, all the particulars communicated to me by Sergeant Bulmer. I believe you will not find an omission anywhere; and I think you will admit, though you are prejudiced against me, that a clearer statement

of facts was never laid before you than the statement I have now made. My next duty is to tell you what I propose to do, now that the case is confided to my hands.

In the first place, it is clearly my business to take up the case at the point where Sergeant Bulmer has left it. On his authority, I am justified in assuming that I have no need to trouble myself about the maid-of-all-work and the shopman. Their characters are now to be considered as cleared up. What remains to be privately investigated is the question of the guilt or innocence of Mr. Jay. Before we give up the notes for lost, we must make sure, if we can, that he knows nothing about them.

This is the plan that I have adopted, with the full approval of Mr. and Mrs. Yatman, for discovering whether Mr. Jay is or is not the person who has stolen the cash-box:

I propose, to-day, to present myself at the house in the character of a young man who is looking for lodgings. The back room on the second-floor will be shown to me as the room to let; and I shall establish myself there to-night, as a person from the country who has come to London to look for a situation in a respectable shop or office.

By this means I shall be living next to the room occupied by Mr. Jay. The partition between us is mere lath and plaster. I shall make a small hole in it, near the cornice, through which I can see what Mr. Jay does in his room, and hear every word that is said when any friend happens to call on him. Whenever he is at home, I shall be at my post of observation. Whenever he goes out, I shall be after him. By employing these means of watching him, I believe I may look forward to the discovery of his secret—if he knows anything about the lost bank-notes—as to a dead certainty.

What you may think of my plan of observation I cannot undertake to say. It appears to me to unite the invaluable merits of boldness and simplicity. Fortified by this conviction, I close the present communication with feelings of the most sanguine description in regard to the future, and remain your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME

7th July.

SIR,—As you have not honoured me with any answer to my last communication, I assume that, in spite of your prejudices against

me, it has produced the favourable impression on your mind which I ventured to anticipate. Gratified beyond measure by the token of approval which your eloquent silence conveys to me, I proceed to report the progress that has been made in the course of the last twenty-four hours.

I am now comfortably established next door to Mr. Jay; and I am delighted to say that I have two holes in the partition, instead of one. My natural sense of humour has led me into the pardonable extravagance of giving them appropriate names. One I call my peep-hole, and the other my pipe-hole. The name of the first explains itself; the name of the second refers to a small tin pipe, or tube, inserted in the hole, and twisted so that the mouth of it comes close to my ear, while I am standing at my post of observation. Thus, while I am looking at Mr. Jay through my peep-hole, I can hear every word that may be spoken in his room through my pipe-hole.

Perfect candour—a virtue which I have possessed from my childhood—compels me to acknowledge, before I go any further, that the ingenious notion of adding a pipe-hole to my proposed peep-hole originated with Mrs. Yatman. This lady—a most intelligent and accomplished person, simple, and yet distinguished, in her manners—has entered into all my little plans with an enthusiasm and intelligence which I cannot too highly praise. Mr. Yatman is so cast down by his loss, that he is quite incapable of affording me any assistance. Mrs. Yatman, who is evidently most tenderly attached to him, feels her husband's sad condition of mind even more acutely than she feels the loss of the money; and is mainly stimulated to exertion by her desire to assist in raising him from the miserable state of prostration into which he has now fallen.

"The money, Mr. Sharpin," she said to me yesterday evening, with tears in her eyes, "the money may be regained by rigid economy and strict attention to business. It is my husband's wretched state of mind that makes me so anxious for the discovery of the thief. I may be wrong, but I felt hopeful of success as soon as you entered the house; and I believe, if the wretch who has robbed us is to be found, you are the man to discover him." I accepted this gratifying compliment in the spirit in which it was offered—firmly believing that I shall be found, sooner or later, to have thoroughly deserved it.

Let me now return to business; that is to say, to my peep-hole and my pipe-hole.

I have enjoyed some hours of calm observation of Mr. Jay. Though rarely at home, as I understand from Mrs. Yatman, on ordinary occasions, he has been in-doors the whole of this day. That is suspicious, to begin with. I have to report, further that he rose at a late hour this morning (always a bad sign in a young man), and that he lost a great deal of time, after he was up, in yawning and complaining to himself of headache. Like other debauched characters, he ate little or nothing for breakfast. His next proceeding was to smoke a pipe—a dirty clay pipe, which a gentleman would have been ashamed to put between his lips. When he had done smoking, he took out pen, ink, and paper, and sat down to write with a groan—whether of remorse for having taken the bank-notes, or of disgust at the task before him, I am unable to say. After writing a few lines (too far away from my peep-hole to give me a chance of reading over his shoulder), he leaned back in his chair, and amused himself by humming the tunes of certain popular songs. Whether these do, or do not, represent secret signals by which he communicates with his accomplices remains to be seen. After he had amused himself for some time by humming, he got up and began to walk about the room, occasionally stopping to add a sentence to the paper on his desk. Before long, he went to a locked cupboard and opened it. I strained my eyes eagerly, in expectation of making a discovery. I saw him take something carefully out of the cupboard —he turned round—and it was only a pint bottle of brandy! Having drunk some of the liquor, this extremely indolent reprobate lay down on his bed again, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

After hearing him snoring for at least two hours, I was recalled to my peep-hole by a knock at his door. He jumped up and opened it with suspicious activity.

A very small boy, with a very dirty face, walked in, said, "Please, sir, they're waiting for you," sat down on a chair, with his legs a long way from the ground, and instantly fell asleep! Mr. Jay swore an oath, tied a wet towel round his head, and going back to his paper, began to cover it with writings as fast as his fingers could move the pen. Occasionally getting up to dip the towel in water and tie it on again, he continued at this employment for nearly three hours; then folded up the leaves of writing, woke the boy, and gave them to him, with this remarkable expression:—"Now, then, young sleepy-head, quick—march! If you see the governor, tell him to have the money ready when

I call for it." The boy grinned, and disappeared. I was sorely tempted to follow "sleepy-head," but, on reflection, considered it safest still to keep my eye on the proceedings of Mr. Jay.

In half an hour's time, he put on his hat and walked out. Of course, I put on my hat and walked out also. As I went down stairs, I passed Mrs. Yatman going up. The lady has been kind enough to undertake, by previous arrangement between us, to search Mr. Jay's room, while he is out of the way, and while I am necessarily engaged in the pleasing duty of following him wherever he goes. On the occasion to which I now refer, he walked straight to the nearest tavern, and ordered a couple of mutton chops for his dinner. I placed myself in the next box to him, and ordered a couple of mutton chops for my dinner. Before I had been in the room a minute, a young man of highly suspicious manners and appearance, sitting at a table opposite, took his glass of porter in his hand and joined Mr. Jay. I pretended to be reading the newspaper, and listened, as in duty bound, with all my might.

"Jack has been here inquiring after you," says the young man.

"Did he leave any message?" asks Mr. Jay.

"Yes," says the other. "He told me, if I met with you, to say that he wished very particularly to see you to-night; and that he would give you a look in, at Rutherford Street, at seven o'clock."

"All right," says Mr. Jay. "I'll get back in time to see him."

Upon this, the suspicious-looking young man finished his porter, and saying that he was rather in a hurry, took leave of his friend (perhaps I should not be wrong if I said his accomplice) and left the room.

At twenty-five minutes and a half past six—in these serious cases it is important to be particular about time—Mr. Jay finished his chops and paid his bill. At twenty-six minutes and three-quarters I finished my chops and paid mine. In ten minutes more I was inside the house in Rutherford Street, and was received by Mrs. Yatman in the passage. That charming woman's face exhibited an expression of melancholy and disappointment which it quite grieved me to see.

"I am afraid, Ma'am," says I, "that you have not hit on any little criminating discovery in the lodger's room?"

She shook her head and sighed. It was a soft, lanquid, fluttering sigh;—and, upon my life, it quite upset me. For the moment I forgot business, and burned with envy of Mr. Yatman.

"Don't despair, Ma'am," I said, with an insinuating mildness

which seemed to touch her. "I have heard a mysterious conversation—I know of a guilty appointment—and I expect great things from my Peep-hole and my Pipe-hole to-night. Pray, don't be alarmed, but I think we are on the brink of a discovery."

Here my enthusiastic devotion to business got the better of my tender feelings. I looked—winked—nodded—left her.

When I got back to my observatory, I found Mr. Jay digesting his mutton chops in an arm-chair, with his pipe in his mouth. On his table were two tumblers, a jug of water, and the pint bottle of brandy. It was then close upon seven o'clock. As the hour struck, the person described as "Jack" walked in.

He looked agitated—I am happy to say he looked violently agitated. The cheerful glow of anticipated success diffused itself (to use a strong expression) all over me, from head to foot. With breathless interest I looked through my Peep-hole, and saw the visitor—the "Jack" of this delightful case—sit down, facing me, at the opposite side of the table to Mr. Jay. Making allowance for the difference in expression which their countenances just now happened to exhibit, these two abandoned villains were so much alike in other respects as to lead at once to the conclusion that they were brothers. Jack was the cleaner man and the better dressed of the two. I admit that, at the outset. It is, perhaps, one of my failings to push justice and impartiality to their utmost limits. I am no Pharisee; and where Vice has its redeeming point, I say, let Vice have its due—yes, yes, by all manner of means, let Vice have its due.

"What's the matter now, Jack?" says Mr. Jay.

"Can't you see it in my face?" says Jack. "My dear fellow, delays are dangerous. Let us have done with suspense, and risk it the day after to-morrow."

"So soon as that?" cried Mr. Jay, looking very much astonished. "Well, I'm ready, if you are. But, I say, Jack, is Somebody Else ready too? Are you quite sure of that?"

He smiled as he spoke—a frightful smile—and laid a very strong emphasis on those two words, "Somebody Else." There is evidently a third ruffian, a nameless desperado, concerned in the business.

"Meet us to-morrow," says Jack, "and judge for yourself. Be in the Regent's Park at eleven in the morning, and look out for us at the turning that leads to the Avenue Road."

"I'll be there," says Mr. Jay, "Have a drop of brandy and water? What are you getting up for? You're not going already?"

"Yes, I am," says Jack. "The fact is, I'm so excited and agitated that I can't sit still anywhere for five minutes together. Ridiculous as it may appear to you, I'm in a perpetual state of nervous flutter. I can't, for the life of me, help fearing that we shall be found out. I fancy that every man who looks twice at me in the street is a spy——"

At those words, I thought my legs would have given way under me. Nothing but strength of mind kept me at my Peep-hole—nothing else, I give you my word of honour.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Mr. Jay, with all the effrontery of a veteran in crime. "We have kept the secret up to this time, and we will manage cleverly to the end. Have a drop of brandy and water, and you will feel as certain about it as I do."

Jack steadily refused the brandy and water, and steadily persisted in taking his leave.

"I must try if I can't walk it off," he said. "Remember to-morrow morning—eleven o'clock, Avenue Road side of the Regent's Park."

With those words he went out. His hardened relative laughed desperately, and resumed the dirty clay pipe.

I sat down on the side of my bed, actually quivering with excitement.

It is clear to me that no attempt has yet been made to change the stolen bank-notes; and I may add that Sergeant Bulmer was of that opinion also, when he left the case in my hands. What is the natural conclusion to draw from the conversation which I have just set down? Evidently, that the confederates meet to-morrow to take their respective shares in the stolen money, and to decide on the safest means of getting the notes changed the day after. Mr. Jay is, beyond a doubt, the leading criminal in this business, and he will probably run the chief risk—that of changing the fifty-pound note. I shall, therefore, still make it my business to follow him—attending at the Regent's Park to-morrow, and doing my best to hear what is said there. If another appointment is made for the day after, I shall, of course, go to it. In the meantime, I shall want the immediate assistance of two competent persons (supposing the rascals separate after their meeting) to follow the two minor criminals. It is only fair to add, that, if the rogues all retire together, I shall probably keep my subordinates in reserve. Being naturally ambitious, I desire, if possible, to have the whole credit of discovering this robbery to myself.

8th July.

I have to acknowledge, with thanks, the speedy arrival of my two subordinates—men of very average abilities, I am afraid; but, fortunately, I shall always be on the spot to direct them.

My first business this morning was, necessarily, to prevent mistakes by accounting to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman for the presence of two strangers on the scene. Mr. Yatman (between ourselves, a poor feeble man) only shook his head and groaned. Mrs. Yatman (that superior woman) favoured me with a charming look of intelligence.

"Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" she said, "I am so sorry to see those two men! Your sending for their assistance looks as if you were beginning to be doubtful of success."

I privately winked at her (she is very good in allowing me to do so without taking offence), and told her, in my facetious way, that she laboured under a slight mistake.

"It is because I am sure of success. Ma'am, that I send for them. I am determined to recover the money, not for my own sake only, but for Mr. Yatman's sake—and for yours."

I laid a considerable amount of stress on those last three words. She said, "Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" again—and blushed of a heavenly red—and looked down at her work. I could go to the world's end with that woman, if Mr. Yatman would only die.

I sent off the two subordinates to wait, until I wanted them, at the Avenue Road gate of the Regent's Park. Half an hour afterwards I was following in the same direction myself, at the heels of Mr. Jay.

The two confederates were punctual to the appointed time, I blush to record it, but it is nevertheless necessary to state, that the third rogue—the nameless desperado of my report, or if you prefer it, the mysterious "Somebody Else" of the conversation between the two brothers—is a Woman! and, what is worse, a young woman! and what is more lamentable still, a nice-looking woman! I have long resisted a growing conviction, that, wherever there is mischief in this world, an individual of the fair sex is inevitably certain to be mixed up in it. After the experience of this morning, I can struggle against that sad conclusion no longer.—I give up the sex—excepting Mrs. Yatman, I give up the sex.

The man named "Jack" offered the woman his arm. Mr. Jay placed himself on the other side of her. The three then walked away slowly among the trees. I followed them at a respectful

distance. My two subordinates, at a respectful distance also, followed me.

It was, I deeply regret to say, impossible to get near enough to them to overhear their conversation, without running too great a risk of being discovered. I could only infer from their gestures and actions that they were all three talking with extraordinary earnestness on some subject which deeply interested them. After having been engaged in this way a full quarter of an hour, they suddenly turned round to retrace their steps. My presence of mind did not forsake me in this emergency. I signed to the two subordinates to walk on carelessly and pass them, while I myself slipped dexterously behind a tree. As they came by me, I heard "Jack" address these words to Mr. Jay:—

"Let us say half-past ten to-morrow morning. And mind you come in a cab. We had better not risk taking one in this neighbourhood."

Mr. Jay made some brief reply, which I could not overhear. They walked back to the place at which they had met, shaking hands there with an audacious cordiality which it quite sickened me to see. They then separated. I followed Mr. Jay. My subordinates paid the same delicate attention to the other two.

Instead of taking me back to Rutherford Street, Mr. Jay led me to the Strand. He stopped at a dingy, disreputable-looking house, which, according to the inscription over the door, was a newspaper office, but which, in my judgment, had all the external appearance of a place devoted to the reception of stolen goods.

After remaining inside for a few minutes, he came out whistling with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. A less discreet man than myself would have arrested him on the spot. I remembered the necessity of catching the two confederates, and the importance of not interfering with the appointment that had been made for the next morning. Such coolness as this, under trying circumstances, is rarely to be found, I should imagine, in a young beginner, whose reputation as a detective policeman is still to make.

From the house of suspicious appearance, Mr. Jay betook himself to a cigar-divan, and read the magazines over a cheroot. I sat at a table near him, and read the magazines likewise over a cheroot. From the divan he strolled to the tavern and had his chops. I strolled to the tavern and had my chops. When he had done, he went back to his lodging. When I had done, I went back to mine. He was overcome with drowsiness early in the evening,

and went to bed. As soon as I heard him snoring, I was overcome with drowsiness, and went to bed also.

Early in the morning my two subordinates came to make their report.

They had seen the man named "Jack" leave the woman near the gate of an apparently respectable villa-residence, not far from the Regent's Park. Left to himself, he took a turning to the right, which led to a sort of suburban street, principally inhabited by shopkeepers. He stopped at the private door of one of the houses, and let himself in with his own key—looking about him as he opened the door, and staring suspiciously at my men as they lounged along on the opposite side of the way. These were all the particulars which the subordinates had to communicate. I kept them in my room to attend on me, if needful, and mounted to my Peep-hole to have a look at Mr. Jay.

He was occupied in dressing himself, and was taking extraordinary pains to destroy all traces of the natural slovenliness of his appearance. This was precisely what I expected. A vagabond like Mr. Jay knows the importance of giving himself a respectable look when he is going to run the risk of changing a stolen bank-note. At five minutes past ten o'clock, he had given the last brush to his shabby hat and the last scouring with bread-crumb to his dirty gloves. At ten minutes past ten he was in the street, on his way to the nearest cab-stand, and I and my subordinates were close on his heels.

He took a cab, and we took a cab. I had not overheard them appoint a place of meeting, when following them in the Park on the previous day; but I soon found that we were proceeding in the old direction of the Avenue Road gate.

The cab in which Mr. Jay was riding turned into the Park slowly. We stopped outside, to avoid exciting suspicion. I got out to follow the cab on foot. Just as I did so, I saw it stop, and detected the two confederates approaching it from among the trees. They got in, and the cab was turned about directly. I ran back to my own cab, and told the driver to let them pass him, and then to follow as before.

The man obeyed my directions, but so clumsily as to excite their suspicions. We had been driving after them about three minutes (returning along the road by which we had advanced) when I looked out of the window to see how far they might be ahead of us. As I did this, I saw two hats popped out of the windows of their cab, and two faces looking back at me. I sank

into my place in a cold sweat;—the expression is coarse, but no other form of words can describe my condition at that trying moment.

"We are found out!" I said faintly to my two subordinates. They stared at me in astonishment. My feelings changed instantly from the depth of despair to the height of indignation.

"It is the cabman's fault. Get out, one of you," I said, with dignity—"get out and punch his head."

Instead of following my directions (I should wish this act of disobedience to be reported at head-quarters) they both looked out of the window. Before I could pull them back, they both sat down again. Before I could express my just indignation, they both grinned, and said to me, "Please to look out, sir!"

I did look out. The thieves' cab had stopped.

Where?

At a church door! ! !

What effect this discovery might have had upon the ordinary run of men, I don't know. Being of a strong religious turn myself, it filled me with horror. I have often read of the unprincipled cunning of criminal persons; but I never before heard of three thieves attempting to double on their pursuers by entering a church! The sacrilegious audacity of that proceeding is, I should think, unparalleled in the annals of crime.

I checked my grinning subordinates by a frown. It was easy to see what was passing in their superficial minds. If I had not been able to look below the surface, I might, on observing two nicely-dressed men and one nicely-dressed woman enter a church before eleven in the morning on a week day, have come to the same hasty conclusion at which my inferiors had evidently arrived. As it was, appearances had no power to impose on *me*. I got out, and, followed by one of my men, entered the church. The other man I sent round to watch the vestry door. You may catch a weasel asleep—but not your humble servant, Matthew Sharpin!

We stole up the gallery stairs, diverged to the organ loft and peered through the curtains in front. There they were all three, sitting in a pew below—yes, incredible as it may appear, sitting in a pew below!

Before I could determine what to do, a clergyman made his appearance in full canonicals, from the vestry door, followed by a clerk. My brain whirled, and my eyesight grew dim. Dark remembrances of robberies committed in vestries floated through

my mind. I trembled for the excellent man in full canonicals—I even trembled for the clerk.

The clergyman placed himself inside the altar rails. The three desperadoes approached him. He opened his book, and began to read. What?—you will ask.

I answer, without the slightest hesitation, the first lines of the Marriage Service.

My subordinate had the audacity to look at me, and then to stuff his pocket-handkerchief into his mouth. I scorned to pay any attention to him. After I had discovered that the man "Jack" was the bridegroom, and that the man Jay acted the part of father, and gave away the bride, I left the church, followed by my man, and joined the other subordinate outside the vestry door. Some people in my position would now have felt rather crestfallen, and would have begun to think that they had made a very foolish mistake. Not the faintest misgiving of any kind troubled me. I did not feel in the slightest degree depreciated in my own estimation. And even now, after a lapse of three hours, my mind remains, I am happy to say, in the same calm and hopeful condition.

As soon as I and my subordinates were assembled together outside the church, I intimated my intention of still following the other cab, in spite of what had occurred. My reason for deciding on this course will appear presently. The two subordinates were astonished at my resolution. One of them had the impertinence to say to me:—

"If you please, sir, who is it that we are after? A man who has stolen money, or a man who has stolen a wife?"

The other low person encouraged him by laughing. Both have deserved an official reprimand; and both, I sincerely trust, will be sure to get it.

When the marriage ceremony was over, the three got into their cab; and once more our vehicle (neatly hidden round the corner of the church, so that they could not suspect it to be near them) started to follow theirs.

We traced them to the terminus of the South-Western Railway. The newly-married couple took tickets for Richmond—paying their fare with a half-sovereign, and so depriving me of the pleasure of arresting them, which I should certainly have done, if they had offered a bank-note. They parted from Mr. Jay, saying, "Remember the address,—14 Babylon Terrace. You dine with us to-morrow week." Mr. Jay accepted the invitation, and added,

jocosely, that he was going home at once to get off his clean clothes, and to be comfortable and dirty again for the rest of the day. I have to report that I saw him home safely, and that he is comfortable and dirty again (to use his own disgraceful language) at the present moment.

Here the affair rests, having by this time reached what I may call its first stage.

I know very well what persons of hasty judgment will be inclined to say of my proceedings thus far. They will assert that I have been deceiving myself all through, in the most absurd way; they will declare that the suspicious conversations which I have reported, referred solely to the difficulties and dangers of successfully carrying out a runaway match; and they will appeal to the scene in the church, as offering undeniable proof of the correctness of their assertions. So let it be. I dispute nothing up to this point. But I ask a question, out of the depths of my own sagacity as a man of the world, which the bitterest of my enemies will not, I think, find it particularly easy to answer.

Granted the fact of the marriage, what proof does it afford me of the innocence of the three persons concerned in that clandestine transaction? It gives me none. On the contrary, it strengthens my suspicions against Mr. Jay and his confederates, because it suggests a distinct motive for their stealing the money. A gentleman who is going to spend his honeymoon at Richmond wants money; and a gentleman who is in debt to all his tradespeople wants money. Is this an unjustifiable imputation of bad motives? In the name of outraged morality, I deny it. These men have combined together, and have stolen a woman. Why should they not combine together, and steal a cash-box? I take my stand on the logic of rigid virtue; and I defy all the sophistry of vice to move me an inch out of my position.

Speaking of virtue, I may add that I have put this view of the case to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman. That accomplished and charming woman found it difficult, at first, to follow the close chain of my reasoning. I am free to confess that she shook her head, and shed tears, and joined her husband in premature lamentation over the loss of the two hundred pounds. But a little careful explanation on my part, and a little attentive listening on hers, ultimately changed her opinion. She now agrees with me, that there is nothing in this unexpected circumstance of the clandestine marriage which absolutely tends to divert suspicion from Mr. Jay, or Mr. "Jack," or the runaway lady. "Audacious hussy" was

the term my fair friend used in speaking of her, but let that pass. It is more to the purpose to record that Mrs. Yatman has not lost confidence in me and that Mr. Yatman promises to follow her example, and do his best to look hopefully for future results.

I have now, in the new turn that circumstances have taken, to await advice from your office. I pause for fresh orders with all the composure of a man who has got two strings to his bow. When I traced the three confederates from the church door to the railway terminus, I had two motives for doing so. First, I followed them as a matter of official business, believing them still to have been guilty of the robbery. Secondly, I followed them as a matter of private speculation, with a view of discovering the place of refuge to which the runaway couple intended to retreat, and of making my information a marketable commodity to offer to the young lady's family and friends. Thus, whatever happens, I may congratulate myself beforehand on not having wasted my time. If the office approves of my conduct, I have my plan ready for further proceedings. If the office blames me, I shall take myself off, with my marketable information, to the genteel villa-residence in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. Any way, the affair puts money into my pocket, and does credit to my penetration as an uncommonly sharp man.

I have only one word more to add, and it is this:—If any individual ventures to assert that Mr. Jay and his confederates are innocent of all share in the stealing of the cash-box, I, in return, defy that individual—though he may even be Chief Inspector Theakstone himself—to tell me who has committed the robbery at Rutherford Street, Soho.

I have the honour to be,
Your very obedient servant,
MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO SERGEANT BULMER

BIRMINGHAM, *July 9th.*

SERGEANT BULMER,—That empty-headed puppy, Mr. Matthew Sharpin, has made a mess of the case at Rutherford Street, exactly as I expected he would. Business keeps me in this town; so I write to you to set the matter straight. I enclose, with this, the pages of feeble scribble-scrabble which the creature, Sharpin, calls a report. Look them over; and when you have made your way through all the gabble, I think you will agree with me that the

conceited booby has looked for the thief in every direction but the right one. You can lay your hand on the guilty person in five minutes, now. Settle the case at once; forward your report to me at this place; and tell Mr. Sharpin that he is suspended till further notice.

Yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM SERGEANT BULMER TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, *July 10th.*

INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE,—Your letter and enclosure came safe to hand. Wise men, they say, may always learn something, even from a fool. By the time I had got through Sharpin's maundering report of his own folly, I saw my way clear enough to the end of the Rutherford Street case, just as you thought I should. In half an hour's time I was at the house. The first person I saw there was Mr. Sharpin himself.

"Have you come to help me?" says he.

"Not exactly," says I. "I've come to tell you that you are suspended till further notice."

"Very good," says he, not taken down, by so much as a single peg, in his own estimation. "I thought you would be jealous of me. It's very natural; and I don't blame you. Walk in, pray, and make yourself at home. I'm off to do a little detective business on my own account, in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. Ta-ta, sergeant, ta-ta!"

With those words he took himself out of the way—which was exactly what I wanted him to do.

As soon as the maid-servant had shut the door, I told her to inform her master that I wanted to say a word to him in private. She showed me into the parlour behind the shop; and there was Mr. Yatman, all alone, reading the newspaper.

"About this matter of the robbery, sir," says I.

He cut me short, peevishly enough—being naturally a poor, weak, womanish sort of man. "Yes, yes, I know," says he. "You have come to tell me that your wonderfully clever man, who has bored holes in my second-floor partition, has made a mistake, and is off the scent of the scoundrel who has stolen my money."

"Yes, sir," says I. "That *is* one of the things I came to tell you. But I have got something else to say, besides that."

"Can you tell me who the thief is?" says he, more pettish than ever.

"Yes, sir," says I, "I think I can."

He put down the newspaper, and began to look rather anxious and frightened.

"Not my shopman?" says he. "I hope, for the man's own sake, it's not my shopman."

"Guess again, sir," says I.

"That idle slut, the maid?" says he.

"She is idle, sir," says I, "and she is also a slut; my first inquiries about her proved as much as that. But she's not the thief."

"Then in the name of heaven, who is?" says he.

"Will you please to prepare yourself for a very disagreeable surprise, sir?" says I. "And in case you lose your temper, will you excuse my remarking that I am the stronger man of the two, and that, if you allow yourself to lay hands on me, I may unintentionally hurt you, in pure self-defence?"

He turned as pale as ashes, and pushed his chair two or three feet away from me.

"You have asked me to tell you, sir, who has taken your money," I went on. "If you insist on my giving you an answer——"

"I do insist," he said, faintly. "Who has taken it?"

"Your wife has taken it," I said very quietly, and very positively at the same time.

He jumped out of the chair as if I had put a knife into him, and struck his fist on the table, so heavily that the wood cracked again.

"Steady, sir," says I. "Flying into a passion won't help you to the truth."

"It's a lie!" says he, with another smack of his fist on the table—"a base, vile, infamous lie! How dare you——"

He stopped, and fell back into the chair again, looked about him in a bewildered way, and ended by bursting out crying.

"When your better sense comes back to you, sir," says I, "I am sure you will be gentleman enough to make an apology for the language you have just used. In the meantime, please to listen, if you can, to a word of explanation. Mr. Sharpin has sent in a report to our inspector, of the most irregular and ridiculous kind; setting down, not only all his own foolish doings and sayings, but the doings and sayings of Mrs. Yatman as well. In most cases, such a document would have been fit for the waste-paper

basket; but, in this particular case, it so happens that Mr. Sharpin's budget of nonsense leads to a certain conclusion, which the simpleton of a writer has been quite innocent of suspecting from the beginning to the end. Of that conclusion I am so sure, that I will forfeit my place, if it does not turn out that Mrs. Yatman has been practising upon the folly and conceit of this young man, and that she has tried to shield herself from discovery by purposely encouraging him to suspect the wrong persons. I tell you that confidently; and I will even go further, I will undertake to give a decided opinion as to why Mrs. Yatman took the money, and what she has done with it, or with a part of it. Nobody can look at that lady, sir, without being struck by the great taste and beauty of her dress——"

As I said those last words, the poor man seemed to find his powers of speech again. He cut me short directly, as haughtily as if he had been a duke instead of a stationer.

"Try some other means of justifying your vile calumny against my wife," says he. "Her milliner's bill for the past year, is on my file of receipted accounts at this moment."

"Excuse me, sir," says I, "but that proves nothing. Milliners, I must tell you, have a certain rascally custom which comes within the daily experience of our office. A married lady who wishes it, can keep two accounts at her dressmaker's; one is the account which her husband sees and pays; the other is the private account, which contains all the extravagant items, and which the wife pays secretly, by instalments, whenever she can. According to our usual experience, these instalments are mostly squeezed out of the housekeeping money. In your case, I suspect no instalments have been paid; proceedings have been threatened; Mrs. Yatman, knowing your altered circumstances, has felt herself driven into a corner; and she has paid her private account out of your cash-box."

"I won't believe it," says he. "Every word you speak is an abominable insult to me and to my wife."

"Are you man enough, sir," says I, taking him up short, in order to save time and words, "to get that receipted bill you spoke of just now off the file, and come with me at once to the milliner's shop where Mrs. Yatman deals?"

He turned red in the face at that, got the bill directly, and put on his hat. I took out of my pocket-book the list containing the numbers of the lost notes, and we left the house together immediately.

Arrived at the milliner's (one of the expensive West-end houses, as I expected), I asked for a private interview, on important business, with the mistress of the concern. It was not the first time that she and I had met over the same delicate investigation. The moment she set eyes on me, she sent for her husband. I mentioned who Mr. Yatman was, and what we wanted.

"This is strictly private?" inquires her husband. I nodded my head.

"And confidential?" says the wife. I nodded again.

"Do you see any objection, dear, to obliging the sergeant with a sight of the books?" says the husband.

"None in the world, love, if you approve of it," says the wife.

All this while poor Mr. Yatman sat looking the picture of astonishment and distress, quite out of place at our polite conference. The books were brought—and one minute's look at the pages in which Mrs. Yatman's name figured was enough, and more than enough to prove the truth of every word I had spoken.

There, in one book, was the husband's account, which Mr. Yatman had settled. And there, in the other, was the private account, crossed off also; the date of settlement being the very day after the loss of the cash-box. This said private account amounted to the sum of a hundred and seventy-five pounds, odd shillings; and it extended over a period of three years. Not a single instalment had been paid on it. Under the last line was an entry to this effect: "Written to for the third time, June 23rd." I pointed to it, and asked the milliner if that meant "last June." Yes, it did mean last June; and she now deeply regretted to say that it had been accompanied by a threat of legal proceedings.

"I thought you gave good customers more than three years credit?" says I.

The milliner looks at Mr. Yatman, and whispers to me—"Not when a lady's husband gets into difficulties."

She pointed to the account as she spoke. The entries after the time when Mr. Yatman's circumstances became involved were just as extravagant, for a person in his wife's situation, as the entries for the year before that period. If the lady had economised in other things, she had certainly not economised in the matter of dress.

There was nothing left now but to examine the cash-book, for form's sake. The money had been paid in notes, the amounts and

numbers of which exactly tallied with the figures set down in my list.

After that, I thought it best to get Mr. Yatman out of the house immediately. He was in such a pitiable condition, that I called a cab and accompanied him home in it. At first he cried and raved like a child: but I soon quieted him—and I must add, to his credit, that he made me a most handsome apology for his language, as the cab drew up at his house door. In return, I tried to give him some advice about how to set matters right, for the future, with his wife. He paid very little attention to me, and went upstairs muttering to himself about a separation. Whether Mrs. Yatman will come cleverly out of the scrape or not, seems doubtful. I should say, myself, that she will go into screeching hysterics, and so frighten the poor man into forgiving her. But this is no business of ours. So far as we are concerned, the case is now at an end; and the present report may come to a conclusion along with it.

I remain, accordingly, yours to command,

THOMAS BULMER.

P.S.—I have to add, that, on leaving Rutherford Street, I met Mr. Matthew Sharpin coming to pack up his things.

"Only think!" says he, rubbing his hands in great spirits, "I've been to the genteel villa-residence; and the moment I mentioned my business, they kicked me out directly. There were two witnesses of the assault; and it's worth a hundred pounds to me, if it's worth a farthing."

"I wish you joy of your luck," says I.

"Thank you," says he. "When may I pay you the same compliment on finding the thief?"

"Whenever you like," says I, "for the thief is found."

"Just what I expected," says he. "I've done all the work; and now you cut in, and claim all the credit—Mr. Jay of course?"

"No," says I.

"Who is it then?" says he.

"Ask Mrs. Yatman," says I. "She's waiting to tell you."

"All right! I'd much rather hear it from that charming woman than from you," says he, and goes into the house in a mighty hurry.

What do you think of that, Inspector Theakstone? Would you like to stand in Mr. Sharpin's shoes? I shouldn't, I can promise you!

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN

July 12th.

SIR,—Sergeant Bulmer has already told you to consider yourself suspended until further notice. I have now authority to add, that your services as a member of the Detective Police are positively declined. You will please to take this letter as notifying officially your dismissal from the force.

I may inform you, privately, that your rejection is not intended to cast any reflections on your character. It merely implies that you are not quite sharp enough for our purpose. If we *are* to have a new recruit among us, we should infinitely prefer Mrs. Yatman.

Your obedient servant,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

NOTE ON THE PRECEDING CORRESPONDENCE, ADDED BY MR. THEAKSTONE

The Inspector is not in a position to append any explanations of importance to the last of the letters. It has been discovered that Mr. Matthew Sharpin left the house in Rutherford Street five minutes after his interview outside of it with Sergeant Bulmer—his manner expressing the liveliest emotions of terror and astonishment, and his left cheek displaying a bright patch of red, which might have been the result of a slap on the face from a female hand. He was also heard, by the shopman at Rutherford Street, to use a very shocking expression in reference to Mrs. Yatman; and was seen to clench his fist vindictively, as he ran round the corner of the street. Nothing more has been heard of him; and it is conjectured that he has left London with the intention of offering his valuable services to the provincial police.

On the interesting domestic subject of Mr. and Mrs. Yatman still less is known. It has, however, been positively ascertained that the medical attendant of the family was sent for in a great hurry, on the day when Mr. Yatman returned from the milliner's shop. The neighbouring chemist received, soon afterwards, a prescription of a soothing nature to make up for Mrs. Yatman. The day after, Mr. Yatman purchased some smelling-salts at the shop, and afterwards appeared at the circulating library to ask for a novel, descriptive of high life, that would amuse an invalid lady. It has been inferred from these circumstances, that he has not thought it desirable to carry out his threat of separating himself from his wife—at least in the present (presumed) condition of that lady's sensitive nervous system.

Freeman Wills Crofts

THE MYSTERY OF THE SLEEPING-CAR EXPRESS[1]

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No one who was in England in the autumn of 1909 can fail to remember the terrible tragedy which took place in a North-Western express between Preston and Carlisle. The affair attracted enormous attention at the time, not only because of the arresting nature of the events themselves, but even more for the absolute mystery in which they were shrouded.

Quite lately a singular chance has revealed to me the true explanation of the terrible drama, and it is at the express desire of its chief actor that I now take upon myself to make the facts known. As it is a long time since 1909, I may, perhaps, be pardoned if I first recall the events which came to light at the time.

One Thursday, then, early in November of the year in question, the 10.30 p.m. sleeping-car train left Euston as usual for Edinburgh, Glasgow, and the North. It was generally a heavy train, being popular with business men who liked to complete their day's work in London, sleep while travelling, and arrive at their northern destination with time for a leisurely bath and breakfast before office hours. The night in question was no exception to the rule, and two engines hauled behind them eight large sleeping-cars, two firsts, two thirds, and two vans, half of which went to Glasgow, and the remainder to Edinburgh.

It is essential to the understanding of what follows that the composition of the rear portion of the train should be remembered. At the extreme end came the Glasgow van, a long, eight-wheeled, bogie vehicle, with Guard Jones in charge. Next to the van was one of the third-class coaches, and immediately in front of it came a first-class, both labelled for the same city. These coaches were fairly well filled, particularly the third class. In front of the first-class came the last of the four Glasgow sleepers. The train was corridor throughout, and the officials could, and did, pass through it several times during the journey.

It is with the first-class coach that we are principally concerned, and it will be understood from the above that it was placed in

[1] See diagram on p. 173.

between the sleeping-car in front and the third-class behind, the van following immediately behind the third. It had a lavatory at each end and six compartments, the last two, next the third-class, being smokers, the next three non-smoking, and the first, immediately beside the sleeping car, a "Ladies Only." The corridors in both it and the third-class coach were on the left-hand side in the direction of travel—that is, the compartments were on the side of the double line.

The night was dark as the train drew out of Euston, for there was no moon and the sky was overcast. As was remembered and commented on afterwards, there had been an unusually long spell of dry weather, and, though it looked like rain earlier in the evening, none fell till the next day, when, about six in the morning, there was a torrential downpour.

As the detectives pointed out later, no weather could have been more unfortunate from their point of view, as, had footmarks been made during the night, the ground would have been too hard to take good impressions, while even such traces as remained would more than likely have been blurred by the rain.

The train ran to time, stopping at Rugby, Crewe and Preston. After leaving the latter station Guard Jones found he had occasion to go forward to speak to a ticket-collector in the Edinburgh portion. He accordingly left his van in the rear and passed along the corridor of the third-class carriage adjoining.

At the end of this corridor, beside the vestibule joining it to the first class, were a lady and gentleman, evidently husband and wife, the lady endeavouring to soothe the cries of a baby she was carrying. Guard Jones addressed some civil remark to the man, who explained that their child had been taken ill, and they had brought it out of their compartment as it was disturbing the other passengers.

With an expression of sympathy, Jones unlocked the two doors across the corridor at the vestibule between the carriages, and, passing on into the first-class coach, re-closed them behind him. They were fitted with spring locks, which became fast on the door shutting.

The corridor of the first-class coach was empty, and as Jones walked down it he observed that the blinds of all the compartments were lowered, with one exception—that of the "Ladies Only." In this compartment, which contained three ladies, the light was fully on, and the guard noticed that two out of the three were reading.

Continuing his journey, Jones found that the two doors at the vestibule between the first-class coach and the sleeper were also locked, and he opened them and passed through, shutting them behind him. At the sleeping-car attendant's box, just inside the last of these doors, two car attendants were talking together. One was actually inside the box, the other standing in the corridor. The latter moved aside to let the guard pass, taking up his former position as, after exchanging a few words, Jones moved on.

His business with the ticket-collector finished, Guard Jones returned to his van. On this journey he found the same conditions obtaining as on the previous—the two attendants were at the rear end of the sleeping-car, the lady and gentleman with the baby in the front end of the third-class coach, the first-class corridor deserted, and both doors at each end of the latter coach locked. These details, casually remarked at the time, became afterwards of the utmost importance, adding as they did to the mystery in which the tragedy was enveloped.

About an hour before the train was due at Carlisle, while it was passing through the wild moorland country of the Westmorland highlands, the brakes were applied—at first gently, and then with considerable power. Guard Jones, who was examining parcel waybills in the rear end of his van, supposed it to be a signal check, but as such was unusual at this place, he left his work and, walking down the van, lowered the window at the left-hand side and looked out along the train.

The line happened to be in a cutting, and the railway bank for some distance ahead was dimly illuminated by the light from the corridors of the first and third-class coaches immediately in front of his van. As I have said, the night was dark, and, except for this bit of bank, Jones could see nothing ahead. The railway curved away to the right, so, thinking he might see better from the other side, he crossed the van and looked out of the opposite window, next the up line.

There were no signal lights in view, nor anything to suggest the cause of the slack, but as he ran his eye along the train he saw that something was amiss in the first-class coach. From the window at its rear end figures were leaning, gesticulating wildly, as if to attract attention to some grave and pressing danger. The guard at once ran through the third-class to this coach, and there he found a strange and puzzling state of affairs.

The corridor was still empty, but the centre blind of the rear

compartment—that is, the first reached by the guard—had been raised. Through the glass Jones could see that the compartment contained four men. Two were leaning out of the window on the opposite side, and two were fumbling at the latch of the corridor door, as if trying to open it. Jones caught hold of the outside handle to assist, but they pointed in the direction of the adjoining compartment, and the guard, obeying their signs, moved on to the second door.

The centre blind of this compartment had also been pulled up, though here, again, the door had not been opened. As the guard peered in through the glass he saw that he was in the presence of a tragedy.

Tugging desperately at the handle of the corridor door stood a lady, her face blanched, her eyes starting from her head, and her features frozen into an expression of deadly fear and horror. As she pulled she kept glancing over her shoulder, as if some dreadful apparition lurked in the shadows behind. As Jones sprang forward to open the door his eyes followed the direction of her gaze, and he drew in his breath sharply.

At the far side of the compartment, facing the engine and huddled down in the corner, was the body of a woman. She lay limp and inert, with head tilted back at an unnatural angle into the cushions and a hand hanging helplessly down over the edge of the seat. She might have been thirty years of age, and was dressed in a reddish-brown fur coat with toque to match. But these details the guard hardly glanced at, his attention being riveted to her forehead. There, above the left eyebrow, was a sinister little hole, from which the blood had oozed down the coat and formed a tiny pool on the seat. That she was dead was obvious.

But this was not all. On the seat opposite her lay a man, and, as far as Guard Jones could see, he also was dead.

He apparently had been sitting in the corner seat, and had fallen forward so that his chest lay across the knees of the woman and his head hung down towards the floor. He was all bunched and twisted up—just a shapeless mass in a grey frieze overcoat, with dark hair at the back of what could be seen of his head. But under that head the guard caught the glint of falling drops, while a dark, ominous stain grew on the floor beneath.

Jones flung himself on the door, but it would not move. It stood fixed, an inch open, jammed in some mysterious way, imprisoning the lady with her terrible companions.

As she and the guard strove to force it open, the train came to a standstill. At once it occurred to Jones that he could now enter the compartment from the opposite side.

Shouting to reassure the now almost frantic lady, he turned back their door. He seized the handle to help them, and then he the line and so back to that containing the bodies. But here he was again baffled, for the two men had not succeeded in sliding back their door. He seized the handle to help them, and then he noticed their companions had opened the opposite door and were climbing out on to the permanent way.

It flashed through his mind that an up-train passed about this time, and, fearing an accident, he ran down the corridor to the sleeping-car, where he felt sure he would find a door that would open. That at the near end was free, and he leaped out on to the track. As he passed he shouted to one of the attendants to follow him, and to the other to remain where he was and let no one pass. Then he joined the men who had already alighted, warned them about the up-train, and the four opened the outside door of the compartment in which the tragedy had taken place.

Their first concern was to get the uninjured lady out, and here a difficult and ghastly task awaited them. The door was blocked by the bodies, and its narrowness prevented more than one man from working. Sending the car attendant to search the train for a doctor, Jones clambered up, and, after warning the lady not to look at what he was doing, he raised the man's body and propped it back in the corner seat.

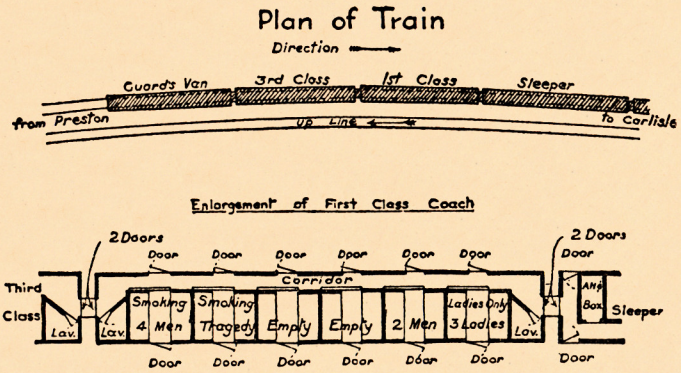
The face was a strong one with clean-shaven but rather coarse features, a large nose, and a heavy jaw. In the neck, just below the right ear, was a bullet hole which, owing to the position of the head, had bled freely. As far as the guard could see, the man was dead. Not without a certain shrinking, Jones raised the feet, first of the man, and then of the woman, and placed them on the seats, thus leaving the floor clear except for its dark, creeping pool. Then, placing his handkerchief over the dead woman's face, he rolled back the end of the carpet to hide its sinister stain.

"Now, ma'am, if you please," he said; and keeping the lady with her back to the more gruesome object on the opposite seat, he helped her to the open door, from where willing hands assisted her to the ground.

By this time the attendant had found a doctor in the third-class coach, and a brief examination enabled him to pronounce both victims dead. The blinds in the compartment having been drawn

down and the outside door locked, the guard called to those passengers who had alighted to resume their seats, with a view to continuing their journey.

The fireman had meantime come back along the train to ascertain what was wrong, and to say the driver was unable completely to release the brake. An examination was therefore made, and the tell-tale disc at the end of the first-class coach was found to be turned, showing that someone in that carriage had pulled the communication chain. This, as is perhaps not generally known, allows air to pass between the train pipe and the atmosphere, thereby gently applying the brake and preventing its complete release. Further investigation showed that the slack of the chain



was hanging in the end smoking-compartment, indicating that the alarm must have been operated by one of the four men who travelled there. The disc was then turned back to normal, the passengers reseated, and the train started, after a delay of about fifteen minutes.

Before reaching Carlisle, Guard Jones took the name and address of everyone travelling in the first and third-class coaches, together with the numbers of their tickets. These coaches, as well as the van, were thoroughly searched, and it was established beyond any doubt that no one was concealed under the seats, in the lavatories, behind luggage, or, in fact, anywhere about them.

One of the sleeping-car attendants having been in the corridor in the rear of the last sleeper from the Preston stop till the completion of the search, and being positive no one except the guard had passed during that time, it was not considered necessary to

take the names of the passengers in the sleeping-cars, but the numbers of their tickets were noted.

On arrival at Carlisle the matter was put into the hands of the police. The first-class carriage was shunted off, the doors being locked and sealed, and the passengers who had travelled in it were detained to make their statements. Then began a most careful and searching investigation, as a result of which several additional facts became known.

The first step taken by the authorities was to make an examination of the country surrounding the point at which the train had stopped, in the hope of finding traces of some stranger on the line. The tentative theory was that a murder had been committed and that the murderer had escaped from the train when it stopped, struck across the country, and, gaining some road, had made good his escape.

Accordingly, as soon as it was light, a special train brought a force of detectives to the place, and the railway, as well as a tract of ground on each side of it, were subjected to a prolonged and exhaustive search. But no traces were found. Nothing that a stranger might have dropped was picked up, no footsteps were seen, no marks discovered. As has already been stated, the weather was against the searchers. The drought of the previous days had left the ground hard and unyielding, so that clear impressions were scarcely to be expected, while even such as might have been made were not likely to remain after the downpour of the early morning.

Baffled at this point, the detectives turned their attention to the stations in the vicinity. There were only two within walking distance of the point of the tragedy, and at neither had any stranger been seen. Further, no trains had stopped at either of these stations; indeed, not a single train, either passenger or goods, had stopped anywhere in the neighbourhood since the sleeping-car express went through. If the murderer had left the express, it was, therefore, out of the question that he could have escaped by rail.

The investigators then turned their attention to the country roads and adjoining towns, trying to find the trail—if there was a trail—while it was hot. But here, again, no luck attended their efforts. If there were a murderer, and if he had left the train when it stopped, he had vanished into thin air. No traces of him could anywhere be discovered.

Nor were their researches in other directions much more fruitful.

The dead couple were identified as a Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Llewelyn, of Gordon Villa, Broad Road, Halifax. Mr. Llewelyn was the junior partner of a large firm of Yorkshire ironfounders. A man of five-and-thirty, he moved in good society and had some claim to wealth. He was of kindly though somewhat passionate disposition, and, so far as could be learnt, had not an enemy in the world. His firm was able to show that he had had business appointments in London on the Thursday and in Carlisle on the Friday, so that his travelling by the train in question was quite in accordance with his known plans.

His wife was the daughter of a neighbouring merchant, a pretty girl of some seven-and-twenty. They had been married only a little over a month, and had, in fact, only a week earlier returned from their honeymoon. Whether Mrs. Llewelyn had any definite reason for accompanying her husband on the fatal journey could not be ascertained. She also, so far as was known, had no enemy, nor could any motive for the tragedy be suggested.

The extraction of the bullets proved that the same weapon had been used in each case—a revolver of small bore and modern design. But as many thousands of similar revolvers existed, this discovery led to nothing.

Miss Blair-Booth, the lady who had travelled with the Llewelyns, stated she had joined the train at Euston, and occupied one of the seats next the corridor. A couple of minutes before starting the deceased had arrived, and they sat in the two opposite corners. No other passengers had entered the compartment during the journey, nor had any of the three left it; in fact, except for the single visit of the ticket-collector shortly after leaving Euston, the door into the corridor had not been even opened.

Mr. Llewelyn was very attentive to his young wife, and they had conversed for some time after starting, then, after consulting Miss Blair-Booth, he had pulled down the blinds and shaded the light, and they had settled down for the night. Miss Blair-Booth had slept at intervals, but each time she wakened she had looked round the compartment, and everything was as before. Then she was suddenly aroused from a doze by a loud explosion close by.

She sprang up, and as she did so a flash came from somewhere near her knee, and a second explosion sounded. Startled and trembling, she pulled the shade off the lamp, and then she noticed a little cloud of smoke just inside the corridor door, which had been opened about an inch, and smelled the characteristic odour of burnt powder. Swinging round, she was in time to see Mr.

Llewelyn dropping heavily forward across his wife's knees, and then she observed the mark on the latter's forehead and realised they had both been shot.

Terrified, she raised the blind of the corridor door which covered the handle and tried to get out to call assistance. But she could not move the door, and her horror was not diminished when she found herself locked in with what she rightly believed were two dead bodies. In despair she pulled the communication chain, but the train did not appear to stop, and she continued struggling with the door till, after what seemed to her hours, the guard appeared, and she was eventually released.

In answer to a question, she further stated that when her blind went up the corridor was empty, and she saw no one till the guard came.

The four men in the end compartment were members of one party travelling from London to Glasgow. For some time after leaving they had played cards, but, about midnight, they, too, had pulled down their blinds, shaded their lamp, and composed themselves to sleep. In this case also, no person other than the ticket-collector had entered the compartment during the journey. But after leaving Preston the door had been opened. Aroused by the stop, one of the men had eaten some fruit, and having thereby soiled his fingers, had washed them in the lavatory. The door then opened as usual. This man saw no one in the corridor, nor did he notice anything out of the common.

Some time after this all four were startled by the sound of two shots. At first they thought of fog signals, then, realising they were too far from the engine to hear such, they, like Miss Blair-Booth, unshaded their lamp, raised the blind over their corridor door, and endeavoured to leave the compartment. Like her they found themselves unable to open their door, and, like her also, they saw that there was no one in the corridor. Believing something serious had happened, they pulled the communication chain, at the same time lowering the outside window and waving from it in the hope of attracting attention. The chain came down easily as if slack, and this explained the apparent contradiction between Miss Blair-Booth's statement that she had pulled it, and the fact that the slack was found hanging in the end compartment. Evidently the lady had pulled it first, applying the brake, and the second pull had simply transferred the slack from one compartment to the next.

The two compartments in front of that of the tragedy were

found to be empty when the train stopped, but in the last of the non-smoking compartments were two gentlemen, and in the "Ladies Only," three ladies. All these had heard the shots, but so faintly above the noise of the train that the attention of none of them was specially arrested, nor had they attempted any investigation. The gentlemen had not left their compartment or pulled up their blinds between the time the train left Preston and the emergency stop, and could throw no light whatever on the matter.

The three ladies in the end compartment were a mother and two daughters, and had got in at Preston. As they were alighting at Carlisle they had not wished to sleep, so they had left their blinds up and their light unshaded. Two of them were reading, but the third was seated at the corridor side, and this lady stated positively that no one except the guard had passed while they were in the train.

She described his movements—first, towards the engine, secondly, back towards the van, and a third time, running, towards the engine after the train had stopped—so accurately in accord with the other evidence that considerable reliance was placed on her testimony. The stoppage and the guard's haste had aroused her interest, and all three ladies had immediately come out into the corridor, and had remained there till the train proceeded, and all three were satisfied that no one else had passed during that time.

An examination of the doors which had jammed so mysteriously revealed the fact that a small wooden wedge, evidently designed for the purpose, had been driven in between the floor and the bottom of the framing of the door, holding the latter rigid. It was evident therefore that the crime was premeditated, and the details had been carefully worked out beforehand. The most careful search of the carriage failed to reveal any other suspicious object or mark.

On comparing the tickets issued with those held by the passengers, a discrepancy was discovered. All were accounted for except one. A first single for Glasgow had been issued at Euston for the train in question, which had not been collected. The purchaser had therefore either not travelled at all, or had got out at some intermediate station. In either case no demand for a refund had been made.

The collector who had checked the tickets after the train left London believed, though he could not speak positively, that two men had then occupied the non-smoking compartment next to

that in which the tragedy had occurred, one of whom held a Glasgow ticket, and the other a ticket for an intermediate station. He could not recollect which station nor could he describe either of the men, if indeed they were there at all.

But the ticket collector's recollection was not at fault, for the police succeeded in tracing one of these passengers, a Dr. Hill, who had got out at Crewe. He was able, partially at all events, to account for the missing Glasgow ticket. It appeared that when he joined the train at Euston, a man of about five and thirty was already in the compartment. This man had fair hair, blue eyes, and a full moustache, and was dressed in dark, well-cut clothes. He had no luggage, but only a waterproof and a paper-covered novel. The two travellers had got into conversation, and on the stranger learning that the doctor lived at Crewe, said he was alighting there also, and asked to be recommended to an hotel. He then explained that he had intended to go on to Glasgow and had taken a ticket to that city, but had since decided to break his journey to visit a friend in Chester next day. He asked the doctor if he thought his ticket would be available to complete the journey the following night, and if not, whether he could get a refund.

When they reached Crewe, both these travellers had alighted, and the doctor offered to show his acquaintance the entrance to the Crewe Arms, but the stranger, thanking him, declined, saying he wished to see to his luggage. Dr. Hill saw him walking towards the van as he left the platform.

Upon interrogating the staff on duty at Crewe at the time, no one could recall seeing such a man at the van, nor had any inquiries about luggage been made. But as these facts did not come to light until several days after the tragedy, confirmation was hardly to be expected.

A visit to all the hotels in Crewe and Chester revealed the fact that no one in any way resembling the stranger had stayed there, nor could any trace whatever be found of him.

Such were the principal facts made known at the adjourned inquest on the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Llewelyn. It was confidently believed that a solution to the mystery would speedily be found, but as day after day passed away without bringing to light any fresh information, public interest began to wane, and became directed into other channels.

But for a time controversy over the affair waxed keen. At first it was argued that it was a case of suicide, some holding that Mr.

Llewelyn had shot first his wife and then himself; others that both had died by the wife's hand. But this theory had only to be stated to be disproved.

Several persons hastened to point out that not only had the revolver disappeared, but on neither body was there powder blackening, and it was admitted that such a wound could not be self-inflicted without leaving marks from this source. That murder had been committed was therefore clear.

Rebutted on this point, the theorists then argued that Miss Blair-Booth was the assassin. But here again the suggestion was quickly negatived. The absence of motive, her known character and the truth of such of her statements as could be checked were against the idea. The disappearance of the revolver was also in her favour. As it was not in the compartment nor concealed about her person, she could only have rid herself of it out of the window. But the position of the bodies prevented access to the window, and, as her clothes were free from any stain of blood, it was impossible to believe she had moved these grim relics, even had she been physically able.

But the point that finally demonstrated her innocence was the wedging of the corridor door. It was obvious she could not have wedged the door on the outside and then passed through it. The belief was universal that whoever wedged the door fired the shots, and the fact that the former was wedged an inch open strengthened that view, as the motive was clearly to leave a slot through which to shoot.

Lastly, the medical evidence showed that if the Llewelyns were sitting where Miss Blair-Booth stated, and the shots were fired from where she said, the bullets would have entered the bodies from the direction they were actually found to have done.

But Miss Blair-Booth's detractors were loath to recede from the position they had taken up. They stated that of the objections to their theory only one—the wedging of the doors—was overwhelming. And they advanced an ingenious theory to meet it. They suggested that before reaching Preston Miss Blair-Booth had left the compartment, closing the door after her, that she had then wedged it, and that, on stopping at the station, she had passed out through some other compartment, re-entering her own through the outside door.

In answer to this it was pointed out that the gentleman who had eaten the fruit had opened his door *after* the Preston stop, and

if Miss Blair-Booth was then shut into her compartment she could not have wedged the other door. That two people should be concerned in the wedging was unthinkable. It was therefore clear that Miss Blair-Booth was innocent, and that some other person had wedged both doors, in order to prevent his operations in the corridor being interfered with by those who would hear the shots.

It was recognised that similar arguments applied to the four men in the end compartment—the wedging of the doors cleared them also.

Defeated on these points the theorists retired from the field. No further suggestions were put forward by the public or the daily Press. Even to those behind the scenes the case seemed to become more and more difficult the longer it was pondered.

Each person known to have been present came in turn under the microscopic eye of New Scotland Yard, but each in turn had to be eliminated from suspicion, till it almost seemed proved that no murder could have been committed at all. The prevailing mystification was well summed up by the chief at the Yard in conversation with the inspector in charge of the case.

"A troublesome business, certainly," said the great man, "and I admit that your conclusions seem sound. But let us go over it again. There *must* be a flaw somewhere."

"There must, sir. But I've gone over it and over it till I'm stupid, and every time I get the same result."

"We'll try once more. We begin, then, with a murder in a railway carriage. We're sure it was a murder, of course?"

"Certain, sir. The absence of the revolver and of powder blackening and the wedging of the doors prove it."

"Quite. The murder must therefore have been committed by some person who was either in the carriage when it was searched, or had left before that. Let us take these two possibilities in turn. And first, with regard to the searching. Was that efficiently done?"

"Absolutely, sir. I have gone into it with the guard and attendants. No one could have been overlooked."

"Very good. Taking first, then, those who were in the carriage. There were six compartments. In the first were the four men, and in the second Miss Blair-Booth. Are you satisfied these were innocent?"

"Perfectly, sir. The wedging of the doors eliminated them."

"So I think. The third and fourth compartments were empty, but in the fifth there were two gentlemen. What about them?"

"Well, sir, you know who they were. Sir Gordon M'Clean, the great engineer, and Mr. Silas Hemphill, the professor of Aberdeen University. Both utterly beyond suspicion."

"But, as you know, inspector, *no one* is beyond suspicion in a case of this kind."

"I admit it, sir, and therefore I made careful inquiries about them. But I only confirmed my opinion."

"From inquiries I also have made I feel sure you are right. That brings us to the last compartment, the 'Ladies Only.' What about those three ladies?"

"The same remarks apply. Their characters are also beyond suspicion, and, as well as that, the mother is elderly and timid, and couldn't brazen out a lie. I question if the daughters could either. I made inquiries all the same, and found not the slightest ground for suspicion."

"The corridors and lavatories were empty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then everyone found in the coach when the train stopped may be definitely eliminated?"

"Yes. It is quite impossible it could have been any that we have mentioned."

"Then the murderer must have left the coach?"

"He must; and that's where the difficulty comes in."

"I know, but let us proceed. Our problem then really becomes —*how* did he leave the coach?"

"That's so, sir, and I have never been against anything stiffer."

The chief paused in thought, as he absently selected and lit another cigar. At last he continued:

"Well, at any rate, it is clear he did not go through the roof or the floor, or any part of the fixed framing or sides. Therefore he must have gone in the usual way—through a door. Of these, there is one at each end and six at each side. He therefore went through one of these fourteen doors. Are you agreed, inspector?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very good. Take the ends first. The vestibule doors were locked?"

"Yes, sir, at both ends of the coach. But I don't count that much. An ordinary carriage key opened them and the murderer would have had one."

"Quite. Now, just go over again our reasons for thinking he did not escape to the sleeper."

"Before the train stopped, sir, Miss Bintley, one of the three in

the 'Ladies Only,' was looking out into the corridor, and the two sleeper attendants were at the near end of their coach. After the train stopped, all three ladies were in the corridor, and one attendant was at the sleeper vestibule. All these persons swear most positively that no one but the guard passed between Preston and the searching of the carriage."

"What about these attendants? Are they reliable?"

"Wilcox has seventeen years' service, and Jeffries six, and both bear excellent characters. Both, naturally, came under suspicion of the murder, and I made the usual investigation. But there is not a scrap of evidence against them, and I am satisfied they are all right."

"It certainly looks as if the murderer did not escape towards the sleeper."

"I am positive of it. You see, sir, we have the testimony of two separate lots of witnesses, the ladies and the attendants. It is out of the question that these parties would agree to deceive the police. Conceivably one or other might, but not both."

"Yes, that seems sound. What, then, about the other end—the third-class end?"

"At that end," replied the inspector, "were Mr. and Mrs. Smith with their sick child. They were in the corridor close by the vestibule door, and no one could have passed without their knowledge. I had the child examined, and its illness was genuine. The parents are quiet persons, of exemplary character, and again quite beyond suspicion. When they said no one but the guard had passed I believed them. However, I was not satisfied with that, and I examined every person that travelled in the third-class coach, and established two things: first, that no one was in it at the time it was searched who had not travelled in it from Preston; and secondly, that no one except the Smiths had left any of the compartments during the run between Preston and the emergency stop. That proves beyond question that no one left the first-class coach for the third after the tragedy."

"What about the guard himself?"

"The guard is also a man of good character, but he is out of it, because he was seen by several passengers as well as the Smiths running through the third-class after the brakes were applied."

"It is clear, then, the murderer must have got out through one of the twelve side doors. Take those on the compartment side first. The first, second, fifth and sixth compartments were occupied, therefore he could not have passed through them. That

leaves the third and fourth doors. Could he have left by either of these?"

The inspector shook his head.

"No, sir," he answered, "that is equally out of the question. You will recollect that two of the four men in the end compartment were looking out along the train from a few seconds after the murder until the stop. It would not have been possible to open a door and climb out on to the footboard without being seen by them. Guard Jones also looked out at that side of the van and saw no one. After the stop these same two men, as well as others, were on the ground, and all agree that none of these doors were opened at any time."

"H'm," mused the chief, "that also seems conclusive, and it brings us definitely to the doors on the corridor side. As the guard arrived on the scene comparatively early, the murderer must have got out while the train was running at a fair speed. He must therefore have been clinging on to the outside of the coach while the guard was in the corridor working at the sliding doors. When the train stopped all attention was concentrated on the opposite, or compartment, side, and he could easily have dropped down and made off. What do you think of that theory, inspector?"

"We went into that pretty thoroughly, sir. It was first objected that the blinds of the first and second compartments were raised too soon to give him time to get out without being seen. But I found this was not valid. At least fifteen seconds must have elapsed before Miss Blair-Booth and the men in the end compartment raised their blinds, and that would easily have allowed him to lower the window, open the door, pass out, raise the window, shut the door, and crouch down on the footboard out of sight. I estimate also that nearly thirty seconds passed before Guard Jones looked out of the van at that side. As far as time goes he could have done what you suggest. But another thing shows he didn't. It appears that when Jones ran through the third-class coach, while the train was stopping, Mr. Smith, the man with the sick child, wondering what was wrong, attempted to follow him into the first-class. But the door slammed after the guard before the other could reach it, and, of course, the spring lock held it fast. Mr. Smith therefore lowered the end corridor window and looked out ahead, and he states positively no one was on the footboard of the first-class. To see how far Mr. Smith could be sure of this, on a dark night we ran the same carriage, lighted in the same way, over the same part of the line, and we found a

figure crouching on the footboard was clearly visible from the window. It showed a dark mass against the lighted side of the cutting. When we remember that Mr. Smith was specially looking out for something abnormal, I think we may accept his evidence."

"You are right. It is convincing. And, of course, it is supported by the guard's own testimony. He also saw no one when he looked out of his van."

"That is so, sir. And we found a crouching figure was visible from the van also, owing to the same cause—the lighted bank."

"And the murderer could not have got out while the guard was passing through the third-class?"

"No, because the corridor blinds were raised before the guard looked out."

The chief frowned.

"It is certainly puzzling," he mused. There was silence for some moments, and then he spoke again.

"Could the murderer, immediately after firing the shots, have concealed himself in a lavatory and then, during the excitement of the stop, have slipped out unperceived through one of these corridor doors and, dropping on the line, moved quietly away?"

"No, sir, we went into that also. If he had hidden in a lavatory he could not have got out again. If he had gone towards the third-class the Smiths would have seen him, and the first-class corridor was under observation during the entire time from the arrival of the guard till the search. We have proved the ladies entered the corridor *immediately* the guard passed their compartment, and two of the four men in the end smoker were watching through their door till considerably after the ladies had come out."

Again silence reigned while the chief smoked thoughtfully.

"The coroner had some theory, you say?" he said at last.

"Yes, sir. He suggested the murderer might have, immediately after firing, got out by one of the doors on the corridor side—probably the end one—and from there climbed on the outside of the coach to some place from which he could not be seen from a window, dropping to the ground when the train stopped. He suggested the roof, the buffers, or the lower step. This seemed likely at first sight, and I tried therefore the experiment. But it was no good. The roof was out of the question. It was one of those high curved roofs—not a flat clerestory—and there was no handhold at the edge above the doors. The buffers were equally inaccessible. From the handle and guard of the end door to that

above the buffer on the corner of the coach was seven feet two inches. That is to say, a man could not reach from one to the other, and there was nothing he could hold on to while passing along the step. The lower step was not possible either. In the first place it was divided—there was only a short step beneath each door—not a continuous board like the upper one—so that no one could pass along the lower while holding on to the upper, and secondly, I couldn't imagine anyone climbing down there, and knowing that the first platform they came to would sweep him off."

"That is to say, inspector, you have proved the murderer was in the coach at the time of the crime, that he was not in it when it was searched, and that he did not leave it in the interval. I don't know that that is a very creditable conclusion."

"I know, sir. I regret it extremely, but that's the difficulty I have been up against from the start."

The chief laid his hand on his subordinate's shoulder.

"It won't do," he said kindly. "It really won't do. You try again. Smoke over it, and I'll do the same, and come in and see me again to-morrow."

But the conversation had really summed up the case justly. My Lady Nicotine brought no inspiration, and, as time passed without bringing to light any further facts, interest gradually waned till at last the affair took its place among the long list of unexplained crimes in the annals of New Scotland Yard.

And now I come to the singular coincidence referred to earlier whereby I, an obscure medical practitioner, came to learn the solution of this extraordinary mystery. With the case itself I had no connection, the details just given being taken from the official reports made at the time, to which I was allowed access in return for the information I brought. The affair happened in this way.

One evening just four weeks ago, as I lit my pipe after a long and tiring day, I received an urgent summons to the principal inn of the little village near which I practised. A motor-cyclist had collided with a car at a cross-roads and had been picked up terribly injured. I saw almost at a glance that nothing could be done for him, in fact, his life was a matter of a few hours. He asked coolly how it was with him, and, in accordance with my custom in such cases, I told him, inquiring was there anyone he would like sent for. He looked me straight in the eyes and replied:

"Doctor, I want to make a statement. If I tell it you will you

keep it to yourself while I live and then inform the proper authorities and the public?"

"Why, yes," I answered; "but shall I not send for some of your friends or a clergyman?"

"No," he said, "I have no friends, and I have no use for parsons. You look a white man; I would rather tell you."

I bowed and fixed him up as comfortably as possible, and he began, speaking slowly in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"I shall be brief for I feel my time is short. You remember some few years ago a Mr. Horatio Llewelyn and his wife were murdered in a train on the North-Western some fifty miles south of Carlisle?"

I dimly remembered the case.

"'The sleeping-car express mystery,' the papers called it?" I asked.

"That's it," he replied. "They never solved the mystery and they never got the murderer. But he's going to pay now. I am he."

I was horrified at the cool, deliberate way he spoke. Then I remembered that he was fighting death to make his confession and that, whatever my feelings, it was my business to hear and record it while yet there was time. I therefore sat down and said as gently as I could:

"Whatever you tell me I shall note carefully, and at the proper time shall inform the police."

His eyes, which had watched me anxiously, showed relief.

"Thank you. I shall hurry. My name is Hubert Black, and I live at 24, Westbury Gardens, Hove. Until ten years and two months ago I lived at Bradford, and there I made the acquaintance of what I thought was the best and most wonderful girl on God's earth—Miss Gladys Wentworth. I was poor, but she was well off. I was diffident about approaching her, but she encouraged me till at last I took my courage in both hands and proposed. She agreed to marry me, but made it a condition our engagement was to be kept secret for a few days. I was so mad about her I would have agreed to anything she wanted, so I said nothing, though I could hardly behave like a sane man from joy.

"Some time before this I had come across Llewelyn, and he had been very friendly, and had seemed to like my company. One day we met Gladys, and I introduced him. I did not know till later that he had followed up the acquaintanceship.

"A week after my acceptance there was a big dance at Halifax. I was to have met Gladys there, but at the last moment I had a

wire that my mother was seriously ill, and I had to go. On my return I got a cool little note from Gladys saying she was sorry, but our engagement had been a mistake, and I must consider it at an end. I made a few inquiries, and then I learnt what had been done. Give me some stuff, doctor; I'm going down."

I poured out some brandy and held it to his lips.

"That's better," he said, continuing with gasps and many pauses: "Llewelyn, I found out, had been struck by Gladys for some time. He knew I was friends with her, and so he made up to me. He wanted the introduction I was fool enough to give him, as well as the chances of meeting her he would get with me. Then he met her when he knew I was at my work, and made hay while the sun shone. Gladys spotted what he was after, but she didn't know if he was serious. Then I proposed, and she thought she would hold me for fear the bigger fish would get off. Llewelyn was wealthy, you understand. She waited till the ball, then she hooked him, and I went overboard. Nice, wasn't it?"

I did not reply, and the man went on:

"Well, after that I just went mad. I lost my head and went to Llewelyn, but he laughed in my face. I felt I wanted to knock his head off, but the butler happened by, so I couldn't go on and finish him then. I needn't try to describe the hell I went through—I couldn't, anyway. But I was blind mad, and lived only for revenge. And then I got it. I followed them till I got a chance, and then I killed them. I shot them in that train. I shot her first and then, as he woke and sprang up, I got him too."

The man paused.

"Tell me the details," I asked; and after a time he went on in a weaker voice:

"I had worked out a plan to get them in a train, and had followed them all through their honeymoon, but I never got a chance till then. This time the circumstances fell out to suit. I was behind him at Euston and heard him book to Carlisle, so I booked to Glasgow. I got into the next compartment. There was a talkative man there, and I tried to make a sort of alibi for myself by letting him think I would get out at Crewe. I did get out, but I got in again, and travelled on in the same compartment with the blinds down. No one knew I was there. I waited till we got to the top of Shap, for I thought I could get away easier in a thinly populated country. Then, when the time came, I fixed the compartment doors with wedges, and shot them both. I left the train and got clear of the railway, crossing the country till I came on a

road. I hid during the day and walked at night till after dark on the second evening I came to Carlisle. From there I went by rail quite openly. I was never suspected."

He paused, exhausted, while the Dread Visitor hovered closer.

"Tell me," I said, "just a word. How did you get out of the train?"

He smiled faintly.

"Some more of your stuff," he whispered; and when I had given him a second dose of brandy he went on feebly and with long pauses which I am not attempting to reproduce:

"I had worked the thing out beforehand. I thought if I could get out on the buffers while the train was running and before the alarm was raised, I should be safe. No one looking out of the windows could see me, and when the train stopped, as I knew it soon would, I could drop down and make off. The difficulty was to get from the corridor to the buffers. I did it like this:

"I had brought about sixteen feet of fine, brown silk cord, and the same length of thin silk rope. When I got out at Crewe I moved to the corner of the coach and stood close to it by way of getting shelter to light a cigarette. Without anyone seeing what I was up to I slipped the end of the cord through the bracket handle above the buffers. Then I strolled to the nearest door, paying out the cord, but holding on to its two ends. I pretended to fumble at the door as if it was stiff to open, but all the time I was passing the cord through the handle-guard, and knotting the ends together. If you've followed me you'll understand this gave me a loop of fine silk connecting the handles at the corner and the door. It was the colour of the carriage, and was nearly invisible. Then I took my seat again.

"When the time came to do the job, I first wedged the corridor doors. Then I opened the outside window and drew in the end of the cord loop and tied the end of the rope to it. I pulled one side of the cord loop and so got the rope pulled through the corner bracket handle and back again to the window. Its being silk made it run easily, and without marking the bracket. Then I put an end of the rope through the handle-guard, and after pulling it tight, knotted the ends together. This gave me a loop of rope tightly stretched from the door to the corner.

"I opened the door and then pulled up the window. I let the door close up against a bit of wood I had brought. The wind kept it to, and the wood prevented it from shutting.

"Then I fired. As soon as I saw that both were hit I got out-

side. I kicked away the wood and shut the door. Then with the rope for handrail I stepped along the footboard to the buffers. I cut both the cord and the rope and drew them after me, and shoved them in my pocket. This removed all traces.

"When the train stopped I slipped down on the ground. The people were getting out at the other side so I had only to creep along close to the coaches till I got out of their light, then I climbed up the bank and escaped."

The man had evidently made a desperate effort to finish, for as he ceased speaking his eyes closed, and in a few minutes he fell into a state of coma which shortly preceded his death.

After communicating with the police I set myself to carry out his second injunction, and this statement is the result.

J. S. Fletcher

BLIND GAP MOOR

From *The Secret of the Barbican* by J. S. Fletcher, and reprinted by permission of Doubleday, Doran & Company.

I

Etherington, manager of the Old Bank at Leytonsdale, in Northshire, was in the first week of his annual month's holiday, and he was celebrating his freedom from the ordinary routine of life by staying in bed an hour longer than usual every morning. Consequently, on this particular—and as fate would have it, eventful—morning, it was 10 o'clock when he came down to breakfast in the coffee-room of the Grand Hotel at Scarborough, in which place he meant to stay a fortnight before going on for a similar period to Whitby. It would not have mattered to him if the hands of the clock had pointed to 11, for he had no plans for the day. His notion of a perfect holiday was to avoid plans of any sort, and to let things come. And something quite unexpected was coming to him at that moment—the hall-porter followed him into the room with a telegram.

"For you, sir," he said. "Come this very minute."

Etherington took the envelope and carried it to his usual seat near the window. He gave his order for breakfast before he opened it, but all the time he was talking to the waiter he was

wondering what the message was about. He was a bachelor—his mother and sister who lived with him were such excellent administrators that he scouted the idea of any domestic catastrophe; neither of the two would have dreamed of bothering him for anything less than a fire or an explosion. His under-manager, Swale, was a thoroughly capable man, and all was in order at the bank, and likely to be so. Nor could he think of anyone who could have reason to wire him about business outside the bank affairs, nor about pleasure, nor about engagements. But just then the waiter retired, and Etherington opened the buff envelope, unfolded the flimsy sheet within, and read the message in one glance.

> "Swale found shot on Blind Gap Moor at 6 o'clock this morning. Believed to be a case of murder. Police would like you to return. Please wire time arrival—LEVER."

It was characteristic of Etherington, always a calm, self-possessed man, that he folded up the message, put it carefully in his pocket-book, and ate steadily through his substantial breakfast before asking the waiter to get him a railway time-table. But he was thinking all the time he ate and drank.

Murder? who would wish to murder Swale? He mentally figured Swale—a quiet, inoffensive fellow of thirty, who had been in the service of the Leytonsdale Old Bank ever since his school-days, and had lived the life of a mouse. And what could have taken Swale, a man of fixed habits, to a wild desolate spot like Blind Gap Moor before 6 o'clock of a May morning? He knew Swale and his habits very well and he had never heard that the sub-manager was fond of getting up to see the sun rise—and yet Blind Gap Moor was a good hour's walk from the town. Perhaps he had been shot during the night, or during the previous evening—in that case, what was he doing there? For Swale was not a fellow to take long, country walks—he was a bookworm, a bit of a scribbler, in an amateur fashion, given to writing essays and papers on the antiquities of the town, and he accordingly liked to spend his evenings and burn the midnight oil at home. Odd—the whole thing! But—murder? That was a serious business, murder! Still, no one who ever knew Swale would ever have dreamed of connecting him with suicide.

As for himself, he must act. He beckoned the head waiter to his side with a nod.

"You'll have to get me my bill," he said. "I am called home—

unexpectedly. But first—a railway guide and a telegram form."

It was a long journey across country to Leytonsdale, involving three changes and two tedious waitings for connections, and 5 o'clock had struck before Etherington got out of the branch train at the little station of his small market town. Lever, the junior clerk who had wired to him that morning, was awaiting him; together they walked out into the road which led to the centre of the place.

"Well?" asked Etherington, in his usual laconic fashion. "Anything fresh since morning?"

"Nothing," replied Lever. "But the police are now certain it's a case of murder; they say there's no doubt about it."

"Give me the facts," said the manager. "Bare facts."

"One of Lord Selwater's gamekeepers found him," answered the clerk. "Just before 6 this morning. He was lying dead near that cairn of stones on the top of Blind Gap Moor—shot through the heart. The doctors say he would die at once, and that he was shot at close quarters. And—he'd been robbed."

Etherington made a little sound which denoted incredulity.

"Robbed!" he exclaimed. "Bless me! Why, what could Swale have on him that would make anybody go to the length of murder?"

"His watch and chain were gone," began Lever, "and——"

"Worth three pounds at the outside!" interrupted Etherington.

"Yes; but he'd a lot of money on him," proceeded the clerk. "It turns out that for this last year or two he's collected the rents for those two farms up on the moor—Low Flatts and Quarry Hill. He'd been there last night. Marshall, the farmer at Low Flatts, says he paid him £56; Thomson, at Quarry Hill, paid him £48. So he'd have over £100 on him."

"All missing?" asked the manager.

"There wasn't anything on him but some coppers," replied Lever. "Watch, chain, purse, pocket-book—all gone. That ring, that he used to wear, was gone."

"How had those men paid him?" asked Etherington. "Cheque or cash?"

"Notes and gold," answered Lever.

The manager walked on in silence for a while. Certainly this seemed like murder preceding robbery.

"Do they suspect anybody?" he asked. Lever shook his head.

"They haven't said so to me if they do," he replied. "The superintendent wants to see you at once."

Etherington went straight to the police station. The superintendent shook his grizzled head at the sight of him.

"Bad business this, Mr. Etherington," he said as the manager sat down. "First murder case we've had in my thirty years' experience of this district."

"Are you sure it's murder?" asked Etherington quietly.

"What else?" demanded the superintendent. "If it had been suicide the revolver that killed him would have been lying close by. No, sir—it's murder! And we haven't the shadow of a clue."

"I've heard the main facts from our clerk, Lever," remarked Etherington. "Is there anything you haven't told him?"

"There's precious little to tell, Mr. Etherington," answered the superintendent. "I've got at everything connected with his doings yesterday. He was at the bank all day, as usual. Nothing happened out of the common, according to your staff. He left the bank at 5 o'clock and went home to his lodgings. All was as usual there. His landlady says he had his dinner at 6 o'clock—just as usual. He went out at 7—didn't say anything. He called on Matthew Marshall at Low Flatts Farm at a quarter past 8. Marshall paid him half a year's rent. He was at James Thomson's, at Quarry Hill, just before 9; Thomson paid him a half year's rent, too. He stopped talking a bit with Thomson, and left there about 9.20. Thomson walked out to his gate with him, and saw him strike across the moor; it was geting darkish by that time, of course, but he saw him going towards that old cairn, near which he was found this morning. There was naught on him—he'd been robbed as well as murdered, sir."

"How far," asked Etherington, "is this place where he was found from these two farms?"

"A good mile from Quarry Hill—mile and a half from Low Flatts," replied the superintendent.

"Everything is very quiet on those moors at night," observed Etherington. "Did no one hear the sound of a shot?"

"I thought of that and inquired into it," answered the superintendent. "Nobody heard any shot. If somebody had heard a shot, you know, they'd only have thought it was one of Lord Selwater's keepers shooting at something. But so far I've heard of nobody who noticed aught of that sort. You see, except those two farms, there isn't a house on that part of the moors."

"There's Mr. Charlesworth's place—up above that cairn," suggested Etherington.

"Ay, but it's over the brow of the hill," said the superintendent.

"That 'ud prevent the sound being heard there. I called at Charlesworth's; they'd heard nothing."

"Any suspicious characters about?" asked Etherington.

"My men haven't heard of any," answered the superintendent. "There were some gypsies in the neighbourhood a fortnight ago, but they cleared out."

"Poachers, now?" suggested the manager. "There are men in this town who poach on those moors."

"Just so. But we've no reason to suspect any particular one of 'em," said the superintendent. "I know of two men who do go up there after what they can get, but I've found out they were both safe in the town all yesterday evening and last night. No, sir, I think the whole thing'll go deeper than that."

"How?" asked Etherington.

"Somebody must have known Mr. Swale was going to collect those rents last night," said the superintendent meaningly. "He was laid in wait for. And yet, so far as I can make out, there wasn't a soul knew he collected them except Marshall and Thompson."

"I didn't know," remarked Etherington.

"Just so. According to the two farmers he's collected them ever since old Mr. Sellers died," continued the superintendent. "Those farms belong to Mrs. Hodgson, a London lady. Now, if somebody had got to know that Mr. Swale would have £100 in cash after he'd been to these farms last night—eh?"

"You don't suspect either of the two farmers?" asked the manager.

The superintendent shook his head firmly.

"No, sir; both decent, honest, straightforward fellows," he replied. "Oh, no! No, it's a deeper job than that, Mr. Etherington."

Etherington rose to go. After all, in this particular matter he could do nothing.

"Of course, there'll be an inquest?" he asked.

"To-morrow, at 10," answered the superintendent. "But, beyond what I've told you we've no evidence. It'll be a case of 'Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown,' you know, unless something comes out, and where it is to come from I don't know."

Nor did Etherington know, and he said so and went away. And after he had dined with his mother and sister, and discussed with them the tragic affair which had interrupted his holiday, he took his walking-stick and set off out of town to the scene of the

murder. And there, in the gathering dusk, he met Charlesworth, the man who lived at an old house called Hill Rise, on the edge of the moor, well above the cairn near which Swale's body had been found. Etherington knew Charlesworth well; he was an old customer of the bank, a man who did a big trade in timber. He was evidently on his way home at that moment, and was glancing inquisitively at the cairn when Etherington came up.

"Nothing to see," he remarked, as the manager advanced. "They were looking for footmarks all day, but they found none. The grass is too close and wiry for that."

"I didn't expect to see anything," said Etherington. "It's some years since I was up this way. I came now to look around, to try to make out how it was nobody heard that shot last night. I understand nothing was heard at your place?"

Charlesworth, a big, athletic man, turned and pointed to the top of the moor above him.

"My place is just three-quarters of a mile over there," he answered. "There's all this rise between it and us, and a thickish belt of wood between, too. We couldn't hear a pistol shot from here. We heard nothing."

"What about those farms?" asked the manager.

Charlesworth pointed in another direction.

"You can't see Low Flatts," he said. "It's down in that hollow yonder. And you can only see a chimney of Quarry Hill—that's it, peeping up behind that line in the moor. They'd hear nothing. It's an easy thing to try, as I told the police. Whoever killed Swale selected a good place. It isn't once in a month there's anybody about here o' nights—at this time of the year."

Etherington made no answer for the moment. He stood staring about him in the fast-gathering dusk. A wild and lonely place, indeed! Miles upon miles of ling and heather, and, beyond the chimney of Quarry Hill Farm, not a sign of human habitation.

"I wonder who did kill him?" he muttered absent-mindedly at last.

Charlesworth turned towards the hill-top with a nod of farewell.

"There's only one man living who knows that," he said; and went away.

II

No evidence was brought forward at the inquest on this unfortunate sub-manager's body which threw any light on the mystery of his murder or incriminating any person. Yet one small, possible clue was produced. A booking clerk from an obscure wayside station in a neighbouring dale came forward, and said that, at 5.30 o'clock on the morning of the discovery of the body, he, on going to his station to issue tickets for the first train, then about due, found walking up and down the platform a rough, sailor-like man, a perfect stranger, who presently took a ticket for Northport.

As he could give no very particular description of him, and as Northport was a town of some 250,000 inhabitants, the chances of finding this man were small. Nevertheless, there was the fact that such an individual, a stranger to the district, was within five miles of the cairn on Blind Gap Moor within a few hours of the time at which Swale was probably murdered.

Nothing came of this. Nothing came of anything that was brought forward in evidence. Only one matter seemed strange. The Leytonsdale Old Bank was one of the very few country banks which issued notes of their own; both the farmers had paid their rents to Swale in these local bank-notes. At the end of a month none of these notes had reached the bank, where a careful lookout had been kept for them, each man having been able to furnish Etherington with particulars of their numbers.

And the manager came to the conclusion that the thief-murderer was a man sharp enough to know that there would be danger in dealing with those notes, and was making himself content with the small amount of gold, and the watch, chain and ring, which he had secured, or was so much more sharp as to change notes at some far off place, whence they would reach the bank slowly and at long intervals.

Six weeks passed, and one day Etherington, entering the bank after his luncheon hour, asked Lever, now promoted to the sub-managership, if anything had happened during his absence.

"Nothing," replied Lever, "except that Mr. Charlesworth retired the first of those bills drawn on Folkingham & Greensedge. It was due next week. He said he'd take it up now, as he had cash of theirs in hand."

"That's the second time he's done that, isn't it?" asked Etherington, glancing at a memorandum which Lever put before him.

"Third," answered Lever. "He retired one in April and one in January. We hold three more yet. One August, October, December."

The manager made no further remark. He went into his own room and sat down to his desk. But he began to think, and his thoughts centred on a question. Why had Charlesworth got into a practice of taking up the bills of his drawn on Folkingham & Greensedge a few days before they were due for presentation? Why, as in the case of the last three, did he come to the bank and retire them by paying cash, instead of following the usual course of having them presented on maturity to their acceptors? Once in a way this might have been done without remark, but it was becoming a practice. Charlesworth was a timber merchant in a biggish way of business. He did a lot of business with a firm in Northport—Folkingham & Greensedge, agents and exporters. For twelve or fifteen years, to Etherington's knowledge, Charlesworth had been in the habit of drawing upon this firm for large amounts against consignments of timber. Up to about six months before this the bills so drawn had always been allowed to mature and to be presented in due course for payment, which had always been prompt. But, as Lever just said, Charlesworth had himself retired the last three before they could be presented. Why?

That question began to bother Etherington. Why should a man bother himself to retire a bill which would fully mature in a week, and would be promptly met? It was a strange course—and since the New Year it had been repeated three times. Again—why?

Etherington waited until Lever had gone to his lunch, then he possessed himself of certain books and documents. He carried them into his own room, and jotted some dates and figures down on a slip of paper. In October of the previous year Charlesworth had brought in six acceptances of Folkingham & Greensedge's. They were of various terms as regards length; each one was for a considerable amount—the one, for instance, which Charlesworth had taken up that very day was for over £1,500. And the whole lot—representing a sum of about £7,000 to £8,000—had, of course, been discounted by Etherington as soon as they were paid in by their drawer. There was nothing unusual in that—Etherington had been discounting similar acceptances, drawn by Charlesworth, accepted by Folkingham & Greensedge, for many years. What was unusual—and in the manager's opinion, odd—was that, mostly, Charlesworth had taken up these bills before

they became due. And for the third time Etherington asked himself the one pertinent question—why?

He took the books and papers back to their places presently, and got out a lot of bills which were waiting to mature. It was easy work to pick out the three of Charlesworth's to which Lever had referred as being still in their hands. He took them to his room and laid them on his desk, and examined each carefully. The first, due in August, was for £950; the second, due in October, for £800; the third, due in December, for £1,175. But Etherington was not concerned, he was not even faintly interested, in the amounts. What he was looking at was the signatures in each case. And presently, remembering that he had letters of Folkingham & Greensedge's in his possession, he looked for and found them, and began to make a minute comparison, letter by letter, stroke by stroke, between the signatures on that firm's correspondence paper and those written across the face of the bills. It was a close, meticulously close, examination that he made—first with the naked eye, secondly with the aid of a magnifying-glass. And, though he was no expert in caligraphy, he came to the conclusion, at the end of ten minutes' careful inspection, that the signature of Folkingham & Greensedge had in each case been carefully forged.

Etherington remained looking at those oblong slips of blue stamped paper for a long time. Then he put them, folded, into an envelope, in his pocket-book. And when Lever came back he went out to him.

"I must leave earlier than usual," he remarked. "There's nothing that needs my attention, I think. See that all's right. And be here at 9 sharp in the morning, Lever; I want to see you then."

He walked quickly away to his own house, made ready for a short journey, and set off. It was only a two hours' run to Northport, and he must go there at once. Such a doubt as that which had arisen in his mind could not be allowed to await solution—he must settle it. If he was right in his belief that he had discovered a forgery, what might not arise out of it?

The Greensedge, who had given part of its name to the firm with which Charlesworth did such extensive business, had been dead some years; so had the original Folkingham. There was no Greensedge now—the entire business belonged to one, Stephen Folkingham, a middle-aged man, who kept up the old style of the firm in spite of the fact that he was its sole proprietor. When

Etherington arrived at his office in the famous shipping town, Stephen Folkingham had gone home. The bank manager followed him to his house outside the town, and was presently closeted with him in private.

"You are surprised to see me?" said Etherington.

"Frankly, yes!" replied Folkingham. "Something important of course."

"And as private as it is important—for the moment at any rate," said Etherington. He drew out his pocket-book, produced the three bills, and spread them on his host's desk. He pointed to the accepting signatures across the fronts. "Are these signatures yours."

Folkingham started. He bent down, glanced at the dates, and let out a surprised exclamation.

"Good heavens, no!" he answered. "I haven't accepted a bill of Charlesworth's for—oh, eighteen months. I've dropped all trade with him for quite that time."

"Then, those signatures, to be plain, are forged?" said the manager.

Folkingham shrugged his shoulders.

"So far as I'm concerned, yes," he replied. "I know nothing whatever about them—nothing! I've dropped that particular line of trade—some time ago. You don't mean to say that Charlesworth——"

Etherington sat down and told Folkingham all about it. There had been six bills. Three had been retired. Probably the other three would have been similarly retired. And—nobody would have known of the forgery. The two men stared at each other when the story came to an end. Each was thinking. But Etherington was thinking of something that was not in the other man's thoughts—something worse than forgery.

"What's to be done?" asked Folkingham at last. "Or, rather, what do you intend to do?"

"I should be greatly obliged to you if you'd come over to Leytonsdale in the morning," answered the manager. "He must be confronted. And your denial to his face—is precisely what I do want."

"All right," agreed Folkingham, after thinking this proposal over. "I'll be with you by noon. Now stop and have some dinner —you can get a train back at 8.30. Dear, dear, this is extraordinary! What on earth's behind it?"

Etherington did not discuss that. He was still thinking of his

other idea; he thought of it all the way home in the train; he thought of it during the night; he was thinking of it at 9 o'clock next morning when he went to the bank and found Lever there and took him into his private room.

"Lever," he said, "you remember that last day that Swale was alive; just stir your memory. Can you remember anything special that he did—here? Anything relating to bank business? Think!"

Lever, a somewhat slow-going young man, thought for some time before he replied.

"I can't think of anything except that, during the afternoon, he got all the acceptances out and went through them," he answered. "There was nothing else, I'm sure, out of the ordinary."

"Did he make any remark to you about any of those acceptances?" asked Etherington.

"No," replied Lever. "None!"

Etherington nodded, intimating that he had no more to ask. But as soon as Lever had left the room he, himself, went out again and walked around to the police station.

III

Etherington remained closeted with Campbell, the superintendent of police, until after 10 o'clock. When he returned to the bank the doors had been opened to the public, and two or three customers had already entered. In one of them, a big, raw-boned countryman, the manager recognised Matthew Marshall, the tenant of Low Flatts Farm.

Marshall, who had evidently cashed a small cheque, was standing in front of the counter with a little pile of gold and silver between himself and Lever, who was leaning forward from the other side to look intently at something which the farmer held in his big hand.

"A' but doan't tell me!" Marshall was saying, in his broad vernacular. "I'm none one to forget owt o' t' sovereigns 'at I paid to poor Mestur Swale t' very neet 'at he wor done for—it is! I tell yer—'im an' me, an' my wife an' all, lewked at that theer mark."

Etherington went directly to the farmer's side and looked at the sovereign, on the upper side of which somebody had stamped two deeply-incised letters—X. M. And Marshall turned to him with a wide smile.

"I'm tellin' Mestur Lever theer 'at this here sovereign is one ——" he began.

"I heard what you said," interrupted Etherington, taking the coin and examining it. "Are you sure of what you say?"

"Ay, shure as I am 'at I'm speakin' to you, Mestur Etherington," answered the farmer promptly. "I'd noticed them letters on that coin afore iver I paid it away to Mestur Swale yon neet 'at t' poor feller was murdered. Him an' me had a bit o' talk about it. Oh, ay, that's t' very identical coin 'at I gev him! Now, isn't it queer 'at it should turn up at yor bank—what?"

"Leave it with me," said Etherington, putting the marked sovereign in his pocket. "Mr. Lever will give you another in its place, Marshall," he went on, leading the man towards the door; "don't say anything about this in the town this morning. Come back here for a few minutes at 12 o'clock."

The farmer opened his mouth, gave the manager a shrewd nod, and went off in silence; and Etherington went behind the counter to Lever.

"Did Charlesworth pay any of that money which he brought yesterday in gold?" he asked quietly.

"Twenty pounds or so," answered Lever. He, too, suddenly looked shrewdly at the manager, and his professional stolidity broke down. "Good heavens," he exclaimed. "You don't think——"

"Hush!" said Etherington. "Listen! Charlesworth will be coming here just after 12. I've telephoned him. He won't suspect anything from my message. Bring him straight into the private room."

There was no one but Etherington in the private room when Charlesworth walked into it at a quarter past 12. And there was nothing remarkable in the manager's surroundings, except that on his blotting-pad lay a sovereign and a closed envelope.

"Just a question or two," said Etherington, in his calmest and iciest manner. "You paid some money in yesterday—to retire one of those acceptances. That sovereign was amongst others which you paid in."

"Well?" said Charlesworth. He glanced at the coin unconsciously; and the manager, watching him closely, failed to see any sign of alarm. "What of it?"

Etherington put the point of his pen to the coin.

"That sovereign," he said, "is marked. It's one which Marshall handed to Swale—the night Swale was murdered. How did it come into your possession?"

Charlesworth's face flushed a little at that, and he bent forward, looking at the coin.

"How on earth can I tell that?" he demanded. "You know how money changes hands!"

"I should like," remarked Etherington, "to know if that sovereign has changed hands more than once since Marshall gave it to Swale. But—here is another question. What did Swale tell you when you met him that night at Blind Gap Moor? Come!"

He rose to his feet as he spoke, picking up the envelope and beginning to take three strips of blue paper from it. And Charlesworth rose, too, and stepped back a little, staring almost incredulously at his questioner.

"Come!" repeated Etherington. "What's the use of denial? Didn't Swale tell you that he had found out that the supposed signature of Folkingham and Greensedge on your acceptances were—forgeries? And didn't you—eh? You know what you did then, Mr. Charlesworth, I think. But——"

He tapped a bell as he spoke, and the door of an inner room opened and revealed Folkingham and the police superintendent, and behind them the round, staring amazed face of the farmer. Etherington laughed.

"You see?" he said, indicating Folkingham. "Hadn't you better confess and be done with it? Come——"

"Look at him!" shouted Campbell, as he sprang into the room. "The revolver! Look out!"

But the room was a big one, and Charlesworth was at the further side. And before any of them could reach him he had turned the revolver on himself and sent a bullet through his brain.

Etherington made a little, half-articulate sound of vexation.

"I hurried him too much!" he muttered. "But, then, I never thought he'd do that——!" He turned to the startled superintendent. "Get him taken away, will you?" he said quietly. "The affair is—over."

Milward Kennedy

DEATH IN THE KITCHEN

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Rupert Morrison straightened himself, drawing a deep breath. He glanced round the little kitchen, deliberately looking at the figure which lay huddled on the floor; huddled, but yet in an attitude which Morrison hoped was as natural as its unnatural circumstances would permit. For the head was inside the oven of the rusty-looking gas-stove.

He wondered whether the cushion on which the head rested was a natural or an unnatural touch. He decided that if *he* were committing suicide, he would try to make even a gas-oven as comfortable as possible.

He walked silently (for he was in stockinged feet) into the passage, and so to the sitting-room. The curtains he had drawn so carefully that he had had no hesitation in leaving on the lights. Quickly but methodically he set to work. Nothing must be left which connected him in any way with George Manning. In any way? Well, how about that package addressed not to Manning but to himself from the local grocer? Probably it had been delivered in error. Still, he must take no chances. He put it aside for future attention.

Where did Manning keep his papers? He was a careless devil, not likely to hide them securely or ingeniously. No, here they were in the writing-table. Only six that concerned Rupert Morrison; was that really all? He untied the packet and read each of the six. His cheeks reddened as he read; they were certainly damning. What a fool he had been in those days; still, he had been wise enough to remember it when Manning turned up out of the blue (he could not have spent *all* the interval in gaol?) and started his blackmail. George Manning on the other hand had grown foolish, for he had not troubled to discover whether his victim had changed.

Morrison's clumsy gloved hands thrust the packet into his breast pocket. He considered. He had plenty of time. Manning, he knew, lived alone in the cottage, and had few friends, certainly none who were likely to call on him; his domestic staff was limited to an old woman from the distant village who came in for part of the day.

The important thing was to be thorough. He had no alibi, and knew that it would be folly to fake one. Provided that there was nothing to show that he had a motive for wanting Manning dead, he would not have to account for his own whereabouts; his tale of a country tramp across the fields and through the woods would not even be wanted. Outside the cottage there was, he knew, nothing to suggest any relationship between Manning and himself save such as might exist between two men, friends long ago in schooldays, who had drifted apart, and then by chance met again: the one respected and prosperous, the other—George Manning.

At last he was satisfied with the sitting-room, but there were still the two bedrooms. Bare, shabby rooms they were, and they did not keep him long. Down to the "parlour" once more. He was reluctant to leave it, for there, if anywhere, he would leave behind a key of the truth.

But he could think of nothing more, except the tumblers on the table and the grocer's package.

There must be only one glass, of course; one must be washed and put away in the kitchen. The other? It, too, must be washed, for when it was found there must be no trace of anything more deadly in it than whisky. Of course, he could wash it and provide fresh prints of Manning's fingers.

He had to make two journeys to the kitchen which the "properties" for the scene which he must set.

Soon one tumbler was back in the cupboard; the other, on which, after he had washed it, he had carefully pressed Manning's limp hand, stood on the table, a trace of neat whisky in it. Beside it the bottle, nearly empty; Manning certainly had been putting it away. That, no doubt, was why he had been so unnoticing when Morrison (none too neatly) had emptied his little flask into the tumbler. He gave a worried glance at the body; if the dose had been too strong the whole plan might go astray. But that was absurd—he had felt the pulse only a minute ago.

And now the last detail—to put that half-sheet of paper on the table. He placed it to look as if it had been folded to catch the eye; he dared not forge a superscription to the coroner.

He smiled; it was a bit of luck that those words had so exactly filled a half-sheet in Manning's letter. Directly he had received it, months ago, he had seen its possible value.

"I am tired of it all. Who can blame me for taking the easiest way? So take it smiling—as I propose to do.—GEORGE MANNING."

But it was cash that Manning had meant to take with a smile—not coal-gas.

There. And the window tight shut. Now to turn on the gas, leave the electric light burning, and be gone. Footprints? No, his stockinged feet had left none, he was sure. Boots on. Quietly out by the back door, with nothing to carry but a walking-stick and that grocer's packet. . . .

Not a soul did Morrison meet on his way home, and when he had emptied the packet of sugar down the wash basin, and in the same way disposed of the ashes of its cover and of those six letters he took another deep breath—of relief this time. . . .

Naturally the police would come to him, for he was a man of standing and he was known to be on terms of acquaintance with Manning. He would be able to tell them that the "poor chap" had seemed very neurotic. . . . His "Good morning" smile as the sergeant was shown in was at these thoughts as well as a matter of policy.

"Yes, sergeant, I know him slightly." By Jove! As nearly as no matter he had said "knew"; he must watch his tongue.

"D'you recognise this, sir?"

Good God! What was the man holding up? A pocket-book, dark blue, with a monogram. He put his hand to his breast pocket. No—could he—— He had an appalling memory of pushing those papers into his pocket. His gloved fingers had felt so clumsy. *Could* he have pulled it out and left it lying on the carpet —there?

He put out his hand; his power of speech seemed to have vanished. He took the pocket-book, half suprised that the sergeant allowed him to do so, and turned it over and over, and stared at it. What use was a denial?

The sergeant was speaking. Was he warning him that anything he might say . . . ?

"That's the boy from Bayley's, the grocer, sir. Seems he delivered the wrong parcel—one for you, it was. Left it last evening at the cottage. Went first thing to get it back. Couldn't get a reply and the front door was locked, so he went around to the back. It seems the back door was open—of course, sir, he hadn't no right to go in, but . . ."

Why *would* the fool bother about that? Go on, man. My heart won't stand this.

"Light burning in the kitchen and this Manning lying with his head inside the oven. Gave the boy a shock, so *he* says, but if you

ask me. . . . Anyways, he came along on his bike to me—I found the pocket-book, sir, in the sitting-room. I thought I'd have a word with you. You see, this Mr. Manning—well—sir, there's a police record."

Why must he pause? Did he expect an answer? Morrison could only stare, his lips trembling.

"Course, sir. You may have given it to him. Or it may just have been an accident. . . ."

What was "it"? Even if he could have spoken, Morrison would have refused now.

"But apart from that, sir—his record and that, I mean—it struck me there was something queer about Manning. And I thought maybe you could help me. That gas-oven, sir, that looks like suicide, doesn't it, sir?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

Was that really his voice?

"There was a bottle of whisky on the table—that came from Bayley's yesterday afternoon, too, and it was empty all but a drain this morning. Maybe it was that that did it. . . ."

What *had* gone wrong? How had this local bumpkin stumbled on the truth?

"At any rate, sir, whisky or lunacy, would you have thought anyone, drunk or sober, could put his head in a gas-oven and turn the tap—and forget the gas was cut off because he hadn't paid the bill? I can understand how it is he's forgotten every blamed thing about what happened last night, but—Hallo, sir, what's up?"

Rupert Morrison was lying at the sergeant's feet.

Mrs. Belloc Lowndes

AN UNRECORDED INSTANCE

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I

Hetty Mingle sat on an iron chair on a side path of the picturesque public garden of famous Lackston Spa, most agreeable and least spoilt of English inland watering places.

It was a beautiful July day, yet this visitor to Lackston Spa felt, as she would have put it to herself, very lonesome, and that though she was living in a nice cheerful boarding-house, where she was only paying four guineas a week with no extras.

One reason why Hetty Mingle felt unlike her generally placid self, was owing to the fact that to-day was her birthday. It gave her a slight pang to reflect that only yesterday she had still been thirty-two, and that now, to-day, she was thirty-three. She did not look her age, though she had a somewhat thickset figure; but she had always had that.

A year ago Hetty's clever, sharp-tongued mother had still been alive, and she had almost more to do than her poor brain could stand. Mrs. Mingle, though a great invalid, would only tolerate her daughter about her when there was something she wanted Hetty to do. Even then she would often say crossly, "Why, I've never met such a butter-fingered soul as you, my dear! Can't you be a bit more nippy?"

Hetty had always been frightened of her mother; sometimes, deep in her heart, she had longed to rebel against her. For one thing she had been dumbly hurt at being always treated as a child —never as a grown woman, and at times she had even vaguely thought of running away, and looking for something to do.

But oh, how she missed her mother now! How strange it was to know—Hetty always knew, rather than felt, things—that she hadn't a friend in the world, except Mr. Quin, the old lawyer who provided her income in the form of a hundred and thirty-six pound cheque, paid quarterly—as had been her mother's wish. This cheque she, Hetty, at once paid into some local branch of the big London bank where Mr. Quin had arranged she should have an account, and the bank always wrote and told the lawyer the money had been banked. Not that Hetty Mingle was foolish or extravagant—that indeed was far from being the case—about money.

Just after her mother's death, eight months ago, over five hundred pounds a year had seemed to Mr. Quin's client an enormous sum—the sort of income one young woman could never spend! But Hetty knew better now. She had learnt the fact that money has a way of slipping through one's fingers, as a funny lady had once put it to her. All the same she was very comfortable, with no one to spend her income on but herself.

And now, sitting in the almost solitary garden, for it was getting on for one o'clock, Hetty opened her red-leather bag—she

was fond of bright colours—and took out of it a thick envelope.

As she read the superscription, tears welled up in her china-blue eyes, for on the envelope was written:

"To my daughter Hetty Mingle, to be opened and read after my decease."

She hadn't looked at what was in that envelope since the day after her mother's death. But now, because it was her birthday, she had made up her mind that she would read, once more, what was written there. So she took out the three big sheets of paper, and read over her mother's last words, knitting her brows in her effort to understand everything that was written there, quite clearly.

"Though my illness has been a great trial to you, I know that you will miss me, Hetty. So I am writing down a number of things which will, I trust, be a help to you.

"Lodgings will never be of any use to you, and the lodging-housekeeper would just live on you; hotels will be too expensive. So, to please me, I beg you always to try and live in some nice boarding-house in a healthy town. When you get tired of one place, you can move on to another.

"I have always kept myself to myself, and I advise you, my dear, to do the same. The sort of people who try and make friends with other people generally end by wanting to get something out of them. You can be just nice and friendly to everybody, without ever being familiar with anyone.

"Never you go and lend a penny of your money to anybody. If you feel sorry for someone, you give them a little present right out. Short reckonings make long friends. When in any money difficulty go straight to Mr. Quin. But don't bother him too often. He doesn't like it.

"What I am now going to write down is important.

"Don't believe those silly folk who run down single life. Marriage isn't all it seems to be. I hate to write the words down, my dear, but I've got to do it. *You're not the sort of young person any man will ever like for herself.*

"If I didn't know myself to be dying, I wouldn't say such a disagreeable thing. But that's the one thought that is worrying me, Hetty. I'm afraid that some bad man will try and marry you for your money. I never taught you to lie, and I don't like beginning to do it now, but those who ask no questions hear no lies. And if any man is so impudent as to ask you about your money, answer quick that you've only got a small annuity.

"I've had a hard life. Harder than I've ever let you know.

I should like to believe what religious folk say—but I don't. If however they do happen to be right, you may feel quite sure of one thing. That is that so far as I can, I'll always be as near to you as I'm allowed to be, watching over you.

"Read over, now and again, all I've written down for you, my daughter. It's all true, if it isn't all pleasant."

Her mother's arid philosophy of life, long before her mother's death, had been constantly impressed on Hetty Mingle; and the one thing she did resent in Mrs. Mingle's valedictory letter, were those unkind words as to no one being likely to want to marry her for herself. Why, since her mother's death, a very nice gentleman had said he just doated on her, and that his one wish was to make her his wife! But he was over thirty years older than herself, and she hadn't liked him at all. Still, he had been what her then landlady had called "very persistent," and, as a matter of fact, she had left Bath, where they had been together in the same boarding-house, mainly because he had worried her so.

. . . . . .

"A very nice day, and not too warm for the time of year, isn't it?"

Hetty Mingle turned, to see that a pleasant-faced, youngish-looking fair man, had drawn a chair up close to where she was sitting.

"I'm a stranger to this town," he went on in a deep, caressing voice, "and I'm wondering if you could tell me the location of the best picture-palace in Lackston, madame?"

Most questions of that kind left Hetty without an answer. But she did happen to know where there was a splendid picture-palace, for it was close to the boarding-house where she was staying. So, feeling rather pleased with herself, she tried to explain, unsuccessfully, exactly where it was.

"I can see that you've not come to this town to be cured of any ailment," went on the stranger, smiling. "You look, if you'll excuse my saying so, quite wonderfully healthy."

This remark pleased Hetty, and she would have liked, but she had not a ready tongue, to answer his compliment by another; for he, too, with his chubby face, bright hazel eyes, and fair moustache, looked in the pink of condition. But instead of saying anything, she suddenly burst out laughing.

Hetty Mingle often did that, when she didn't quite know what to say.

"I'm here on business," he said genially. "My business is looking out for what's called antiques. They're often to be picked up cheap, in this sort of town."

"Fancy that!" she exclaimed.

"If you could put me on to anything of the kind—I'd be prepared to pay a handsome commission for same."

Hetty was more used to people who wanted to be given money, than to offer money, and her heart warmed to the speaker of those pleasant words.

"Now wherever you may happen to be staying, in rooms or an hotel, maybe——?" He looked at her insinuatingly. But she only smiled, foolishly. And he went on, "—there may be some nice little bit of furniture, a lady's work-box, say? I mean the kind that has legs; or a pretty painted chair or two?"

And then at last Hetty Mingle did speak. "There's nothing of the sort where I'm living," she observerd; and there was a tone of regret in her voice. "It's a boarding-house; but of course I haven't been into all the bedrooms. There might be something of the sort in one of them——"

The stranger looked just a little disappointed. He had supposed his new acquaintance—he thought her a widow—to be an hotel visitor, for she was very nicely dressed, though in a rather old-fashioned way. Her gown was made of expensive grey stuff, and her black satin cape was fastened with a real diamond brooch. As a matter of fact, Hetty Mingle's long dead father had been a jeweller.

"You find a boarding-house more comfortable and homey than an hotel, I expect?" he observed.

"I hate hotels," she announced with sudden spirit. "You don't get the value there for your money you ought to do in such places."

"Right!" he exclaimed, "I'm beginning to see that you're a very sensible young lady."

Hetty bridled. It was pleasant to be called "a very sensible young lady."

"Do you often come out here—I mean into this garden?"

She gave a sudden loud laugh. "There isn't much else to do in the morning, is there? I mean in a place like this."

"Ever go to the Pictures?" he asked, leaning towards her.

"I do, now and again." Then she hesitated, for already she did not want him to think her mean. "But those sort of places run away with a lot of money," she said regretfully.

"Would you think me presuming if I asked you to come with me to the Pictures to-morrow? I mean, of course, with me standing Sam?"

A look of real pleasure flashed into Hetty Mingle's face. When a couple staying in her boarding-house asked her to go to a cinema they always meant her to pay for herself; and sometimes, as she had found with dismay, they actually expected her to pay for them!

In spite of her strict adhesion to her mother's advice concerning questions as to her income, and so on, advice which had often been uttered by the departed Mrs. Mingle during her lifetime, as well as written down to be read after her death, Miss Mingle's fellow boarders generally ended by forming a correct idea as to her fortunate circumstances. So it was a delightful, as well as a novel, experience, to find someone, especially an attractive young man, actually wanting to treat her to something.

Even so, she looked at him helplessly, wondering, in a muddled, anxious sort of way, when and how they were to meet. She wouldn't for the world have allowed him to call for her at the boarding-house. Hetty hated and feared what she called "tittle-tattle," and she was painfully sensitive to any form of ridicule.

Meanwhile the stranger was looking at her very hard out of the corner of his eye.

"My name's Grantham," he said, "Jack Grantham."

He waited a bit, and, as she said nothing, he asked, with a peculiarly ingratiating smile, "May I ask your name?"

"My name?" She was a little taken aback by the question. Still, what could she do but answer it?

"My name is Henrietta Mingle."

"Is it Miss—or is it Missis?"

"I'm Miss Mingle," she replied, with a trace of reluctance.

At once he said—for he was the kind of man who always prefers to tell an untruth, if it be equally convenient—"That's funny! I felt sure from the first that you were a single lady!"

"Are you married?" asked Hetty inquisitively. She really felt she would like to know.

"Not me!" he answered gaily, "though I've plenty on which to keep a wife—which is more than some chaps can say in these hard times. But yours truly never met the lady yet that I wanted to make Mrs. Grantham."

And then, all at once, the clock on the town-hall tower struck one. Hetty got up, and so did Mr. Grantham.

"Shall we say just here, to-morrow, at two?" he asked abruptly. "Then we might go a little turn before the Pictures. There won't be any hurry, for I shall take our seats in advance."

Thus began, in that apparently casual careless way, the one great adventure of Hetty Mingle's life. Her first outing with Jack Grantham, the two hours spent with him at the Pictures was, in itself, a unique experience. She even thinks of it, sometimes, now. It was the first time, in her thirty-three years, that a man had ever held her hand.

Day by day her acquaintance with this new friend grew closer and closer—so close, indeed, that any other young woman than poor Hetty would have felt no surprise when he asked her, as he did when their acquaintance had lasted a little over a fortnight, to marry him.

And yet, though she was so simple, Hetty Mingle was as cunning as only the very simple can be.

Not a single person in the boarding-house where she was living, had even a suspicion of what had been going on. True, Miss Mingle was out a great deal, but then all the boarders were out a great deal in this beautiful summer weather. But while the others went long char-à-banc excursions, Hetty and Mr. Grantham, as she went on calling him, spent their time in the old curiosity shops of the town, and in motoring round the villages near by where, now and again, a good little piece could be picked up cheap.

In sixteen days Jack Grantham expended—and he kept a careful record of all his expenditure—twelve pounds, fourteen shillings, and sixpence, on his courtship of Hetty Mingle. In return she had told him everything there was to tell about herself and, during a lightning visit to London, he had spent a very useful shilling at Somerset House, reading Mrs. Mingle's will.

During those same sixteen days Hetty had fallen deeply, pathetically deeply, in love, with the only pleasantly mannered man who had ever taken the trouble to make himself agreeable to her. And when, at last, the two became engaged, she willingly assented to her lover's proposal that they should go south, and be married in Canterbury.

On one occasion, while they were happily discussing their joint future, he had observed: "On the day we're married we shall each have to make a new will, my dear. I'll leave you everything I've got—quite a tidy little bit, I'm glad to say—and you'll like-

wise do the same by me." She had not made him the eager answer he had expected. But he had got used, by now, to such omissions, and he had not supposed he would have any trouble with her.

Neither did he. After leaving the little Canterbury church where they had been married—she had agreed that it would be much nicer and more respectable to be married in a church than at a register office—they had proceeded to a local lawyer's office, and each made a short will, leaving to the other all that he, or she, should die possessed of.

Hetty's husband urged her to do something else on her wedding-day and, rather to his surprise, she had jibbed at doing it. But in the end she had obeyed him. This which he made her do was to write, at his dictation, a careful, though not too intelligently worded, letter, acquainting the lawyer, Mr. Quin, with her marriage to a gentleman named Grantham, who dealt in antiques.

The bridegroom had pondered over carefully the question of what address his bride should give Mr. Quin—the more so that they meant to move about a bit, before settling down. Then, all at once, he had exclaimed: "I must be getting dotty! You need only give him the name of the bank here, in Canterbury, where you've just paid in his cheque, ducky. We've got to keep in touch with that bank, and your old rascal"—the speaker considered all lawyers rascals—"will know it in any case, once his cheque has been passed through."

II

Dr. Pomfret-Smith was the one medical man in the lovely seaside Sussex village of Trimling. From a doctor's point of view, both the old-world hamlet, and the mushroom bungalow town on the strip of shingle which lay above the beach half a mile away, were almost unpleasantly healthy. Indeed, but for the fact that his delicate little wife had three hundred pounds a year of her own, they could never have stuck it out.

As so often happened, the doctor was sitting to-day in the study which was also his consulting-room, idly reading a book, when he was told that a Mr. Grantham wished to see him. He jumped up, and a moment later the visitor walked through into the room looking, as a man is apt to in such circumstances, just a little foolish.

Dr. Pomfret-Smith felt a twinge of disappointment; for Mr.

Grantham was the sort of man who could only be described as extraordinarily ordinary.

The stranger was a fair, stocky man, and Pomfret-Smith, who prided himself, as doctors are apt to do, on his power of human diagnosis, told himself that the man standing before him was probably a prosperous commercial traveller. His visitor looked, but this was a mere detail, remarkably healthy, a fact further proved by his first words, which were: "I've not come for myself, for I'm always O.K. I've come to ask you just to see my wife, doctor; she doesn't seem quite the thing, and I'm a bit uneasy about her."

Dr. Pomfret-Smith insensibly thawed, for the stranger had a soft, attractive voice.

"What's the matter with Mrs. Grantham?" he asked kindly.

"She's been having awful headaches, and that seems quite wrong in a place like this. Also, she turned faint yesterday."

The doctor looked at the young man thoughtfully. "Perhaps she was doing too much before she came here. Have you just started your holiday?"

A somewhat embarrassed smile came over Mr. Grantham's face, as he replied, readily enough, "The truth is, doctor, that we're still on our honeymoon! We were married at St. Olave's church in Canterbury, just three weeks ago."

"I see. Is Mrs. Grantham well, apart from headaches? Quite cheerful, and so on?"

"Very cheerful," was the eager answer. "Quite merry and bright, if I may so express it."

"Well, I'd better see her."

Dr. Pomfret-Smith felt just a little surprised, when Mr. Grantham brought his new-made wife into the consulting-room. He had expected to see a nervous-looking girl, wearing, more likely than not, very high heels, and one of those foolish little hats which give no shade to a young feminine face. Instead, he saw before him a stoutly-built young woman, who appeared older than her husband, and who was sensibly dressed in good clothes. She was very plain, and her bright green mushroom hat did not add to her attractions; still, she looked good-humoured and kindly, though her expression was somewhat vacant.

"Well, Mrs. Grantham—I hear you have not been very well? Perhaps the sea air has upset you. It does some people."

She began to laugh—"He! he! he!"—as if the doctor had said something humourous. Then she said, with a trace of

defiance, "I've often lived by the sea. Never did me any harm. I just feel queer, don't I?" and she turned to her husband with a nervous look in her china blue eyes.

"Perhaps your wife would like to see me alone, Mr. Grantham?"

There came a sudden change over Dr. Pomfret-Smith's new patient. A look of alarm, almost of suspicion, flashed across her large pink and white face. "Oh no!" she cried. "I'd rather my husband stayed here."

The doctor smiled an inward smile. His unspoken question was answered. This odd-looking young woman was evidently very fond of her husband. They were on excellent terms the one with the other.

He said soothingly: "The sun's been very hot these last few days. I expect you've been sitting out on the beach, and that you've simply got what I call a sun-headache. I'll write you out a prescription for something that I hope will do you good."

He made out a prescription for a soothing mixture, and handed it to the lady's husband. "By the way, where are you staying?" he asked.

"We've taken the Old Bungalow for two months, sir."

"I'm sorry you've done that! It's a horrid, ramshackle little place. Why, it hasn't even a bathroom. But then I suppose you bathe a lot in the sea?"

"Why yes." The man smiled broadly. "We do do that, doctor. But all the same—as there's plenty of fresh water laid on, I'm hiring a bath and having it moved in."

He turned to his wife. "Now then, Hetty? I think we left your parasol in the other room. Will you go and wait for me there?"

She went off obediently, and then Mr. Grantham turned to the doctor. "I'm very much obliged to you, doctor!" he exclaimed. "I expect she'll be as right as a trivet, to-morrow."

Then to the surprise of Dr. Pomfret-Smith, the speaker laid a ten-shilling note on the table. "I hope this is right, sir? Short reckonings make long friends—don't they?"

In spite of himself the medical man felt pleased. He knew only too well what a difficult and sometimes unpleasant job it is to collect small accounts in a place like Trimling Bay. So "Thank you very much," he observed. It was pleasant to have earned ten shillings in as many minutes, with practically no trouble.

"I'd like you to see my wife again, doctor, if she doesn't get better in the next day or two?"

"I shall be delighted to see Mrs. Grantham any time," replied Dr. Pomfret-Smith cordially. "If you don't want to come all the way to the village, you've only got to send me a message, and I'll come round to the Old Bungalow at once."

. . . . . .

Four days later, on a fine sunny morning, Hetty Grantham, as she was now, wandered out, at about eleven o'clock, on to the verandah of the Old Bungalow. The weatherbeaten, squat grey building stood by itself, quite a way from the row of new one-storey, red and white dwellings each filled now, with a full complement of cheerful holiday-makers.

Hetty felt queerly lonely, and even depressed, no doubt because this was the first time her husband had left her since their wedding-day. And that wasn't all! Something had altered her dear "hubby," as Jack Grantham had taught her to call him. He had been sharp and impatient on their way to the doctor, while trying to make her understand what she was to say when there. But he had begun to really change in his manner after that visit. It wasn't that he was unkind; it was simply that he was no longer affectionate; and she wondered hazily whether she had offended him in any way. He had become so glum, and yesterday afternoon he had spent a long time in writing a letter, and she had caught a glimpse of the address.

It was to a "Mrs. Somebody" in London, N.W., and it had made her feel vaguely jealous. Then, this morning, he had suddenly said that he had to go away for a night on business; and, as he was going off, when she put her arms round his neck, he had pushed her away quite roughly, with, "There, that'll do! Even new married folk can't always be kissing and cuddling one another."

Though Hetty could not have echoed the old philosopher's assertion: "I think. Therefore I am," she was capable of very real mental pain and distress, and she was so suffering acutely, now.

For one thing, the hundred and thirty odd pounds she had received just two days before her marriage, and which Jack Grantham had persuaded her to put into the Canterbury branch of Mr. Quin's bank, was melting—and melting far too quickly to her mind. Her husband had begun by making her draw out twenty-five pounds in cash, when she had registered her new signature, and, as she had never drawn to "self" so big a cheque before, it had made her feel quite nervous. Also, though she had kept that

fact to herself, she had not liked it when her lord and master, as he had called himself more than once in joke, had assumed the charge of the money. She had always been used to keeping her cash in a stout little jewel-box of which she always wore the key round her neck.

All this being so, imagine Hetty's horrified astonishment when twelve days after her marriage, her "hubby" had casually observed one morning that as their "oof" was running out, she had better make out another cheque for twenty pounds. That suggestion had seriously upset her, and it had led to their first quarrel.

But in the end she had given him the cheque, although she had begun by vehemently declaring that nothing would make her do so. And then, a few days ago, he had made her draw yet another cheque! But this time she had understood the reason, for it was for half the rent in advance of this horrid, ramshackle, not overclean, bungalow, on the verandah of which she was now sitting staring out at the dimpling sea—dotted, to her right, with jolly bathing figures—with puzzled, anxious eyes.

It may have been an hour later when there fell on her ears the discordant peal of the old-fashioned bell of the Old Bungalow. Who could it be? They didn't know anyone, yet, in this funny place, and they did all their own shopping. Hetty made her way into the one living-room, which was called the lounge, and opened the front door.

Right across the threshold lay a huge white bath, while outside, on the half-made road, stood the cart whence, obviously, had come the bath.

Now she had secretly thought it a very silly thing of her "hubby" to want to have this kind of a bath in this tiny place. There was a large tin basin which the people who had been there before had found good enough. But Jack Grantham had been set on having what he called "a proper bath"; and he had arranged to hire one for two months from the local plumber. Hetty had been with him at the time he had chosen it, and she remembered, now, that the plumber had very honestly pointed out that they would have a bit of a job emptying that sort of bath, as there was nothing to take off the water.

But the new tenant of the Old Bungalow had been quite sharp about it. "That's my business!" he had exclaimed. And then, laughingly, he had added, "I do like a nice drop of clean fresh water, after I've had a dip in the sea." And the man had answered, "Why yes, sir. Most people do, I fancy."

She came back, with a mental jerk of annoyance, to the present.

Three men were now slouching along on the narrow dusty path; and one of them asked, not over pleasantly, "Well now, missus? Where are we to put this 'ere hobject? The gentleman said as it wasn't to be delivered till to-morrow; but we was coming down this way with the cart, so we brought it to-day. It takes three of us to move that bath, and it's a bothersome job; but you won't forget us on such a 'ot day as this?"

Now Hetty was not sure where exactly her husband did wish this tiresome bath to be placed. As a matter of fact there were two cold-water taps in the bungalow: one in the kitchen, one in a kind of tiny scullery. It would be equally inconvenient, not to say impossible, to have this big bath under either tap.

As she stood hesitating, and muttering half to herself, "He's away to-day, and I don't know where he does want it put," the most intelligent of the three men sized her up—as the saying is.

He looked over her shoulder. "Hadn't we better just dump it down in this 'ere hall? When your good gentleman is back, I'll send down two of our chaps to help to move it; 'tisn't as if there were stairs."

She nodded listlessly; and, after they had put the bath in a corner of the lounge, opposite her own bedroom door, Hetty unwillingly produced a shilling.

As the three went off, without thanking her, she felt just a little sorry she hadn't made it two shillings. But when she remembered how quickly her money was going, she reminded herself of a Victorian proverb her mother had been fond of quoting. This Victorian proverb runs: "Be just, before you are generous."

At about eight o'clock that same evening Jack Grantham came home. He looked very tired; and, to his wife's astonishment, and yes, extreme horror, when he saw the place where the bath had been put, he began to swear furiously. Poor Hetty had not known there was such language in the world!

At last she began timidly to remonstrate with him, and he turned on her with a fresh volley of oaths. Then, suddenly, he realised how much he was scaring her, and he pulled himself together.

"I'm not blaming *you,* my dear! Of course I'm not. I'm cursing the blasted fool who sent the thing here to-day, and his blasted fools who dared to leave it in such a place as *that.* Why, it stands to reason we want it where the other old tub stands, in the scullery—that's the place for a bath!"

"I'm very sorry," she murmured, still shaking with fear. "I'll walk up to the village to-morrow morning, and get them to send the men down again."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" he cried angrily. "I'll get in a couple of chaps from off the beach; give 'em sixpence each; and lend a hand myself. That —— plumber 'ud go and charge quite a lot, for sending his men here again."

III

At ten o'clock that same night Hetty felt, as she always did feel at about that time, overwhelmingly sleepy. Her husband had recovered his temper, though he had been very scarcastic when she had had to confess that she had no idea how something tasty could be made out of what remained of the cold meat on which they had now lived for two days.

At last she said nervously, "Don't you think it's about time for bed?"

He answered at once. "You go to bed, my dear. As for me, I'll go out for a turn and a cigar before turning in."

He kissed her in a perfunctory way, and she went off into her room feeling much happier.

Now very early in their married life, in fact the day after they were married, Jack Grantham had explained to her that he couldn't sleep in a room with anyone else there; so since then they had always occupied separate rooms. In the hotels where they had stayed he had always taken, as a matter of course, the better of the two apartments, but here, to Hetty's grateful surprise, her husband had insisted that she should have the best bedroom, that overlooking the beach, in the Old Bungalow.

To-night, after she had undressed, there suddenly came over her a most curious and frightening feeling or sensation. This was that her dead mother was close to her—an invisible, while yet an almost palpable, presence. And the effect of this curious, extremely disturbing, sensation, was that it made her feel as if she was still Hetty Mingle, and that her marriage to Jack Grantham had been a dream.

She got into bed, and after awhile she went fast asleep. It may have been a few minutes, or it may have been an hour, later, when all at once she awoke with a start to hear, or so it seemed to her, her dead mother's voice saying close to her right ear, what her mother had so often said in life, *"Try and think, Hetty. Try and think for yourself, my dear."*

Oppressed and bewildered, she sat up in bed; and then, to her extreme surprise, she saw a line of gleaming light beneath her door. The Old Bungalow, in common with all the other newer and smarter bungalows, had had the electric light put in the year before.

Apart from that narrow thread of light beneath the door there was also, higher up, a shaft of diffused brilliance like that produced by the bull's-eye of a small lantern. Though it looked oddly eerie in the otherwise dark room, Hetty did not think it so, for she knew what caused that bright spot of light. The bedroom door was made of cheap, grained, foreign wood, and one of the knots in the wood had gone, leaving a round hollow hole. The owner of the Old Bungalow had pointed this fact out with a smile to Hetty, observing as he did so, "Anyone standing the other side of the door can see into this room through that hole, so my wife generally hangs a skirt, or something of the sort, on one of the hooks. That makes it quite all right."

She told herself, now, that her hubby must have left the light on, when he had come in and gone to bed. What a waste! Surely she ought to get up and turn it out, even at the risk of waking him, for, unlike herself, he was a light sleeper.

She slipped out of bed very quietly, and then, all at once, she heard him moving about in the lounge! What could Jack be doing there, at this time of night?

As is the case with all those poor humans dowered with Hetty's peculiar mentality, there was an inquisitive, as well as a cunning, streak, in her nature. So instead of opening the door, as an ordinary woman would have done, and ordering her husband off —good humouredly or otherwise—to bed, she crept across the floor to her door, and looked through the round hollow hole into the lounge.

And then——? And then the sight which met her eyes was so extraordinary and unexpected, that she nearly burst into a loud guffaw of laughter—nearly, but not quite, for she felt exceedingly curious to see what it was that her hubby was going to do next!

What he was doing now was funny enough, for Jack Grantham was taking off his outdoor shoes, and in his stockinged feet he was capering about on the floor with a most queer kind of expression on his fleshy face. It was just as if he were hugely enjoying some silly secret joke, all to himself.

Suddenly he scampered over to the place where stood the bath. What queer creatures men were—what babies, after all! Several

times Hetty had heard people say that men were nothing more than grown-up children—but she had never believed it till to-night.

Whatever was he going to do now? She had not long to wait, for Hetty's husband, with the quick agility of a monkey, swung himself into the big white empty bath.

Now he was sitting in it, of course fully dressed, his face convulsed with silent mirth.

He sat up! He lay half down! He leapt about in the big white dry cavity! Once he so entirely disappeared under the rim that she could not see him at all from where she stood concealed, fascinated by his queer antics.

But at last he leapt out of the bath, and walking quickly over to the wall, turned out the electric light.

A moment later she heard the sound of the other bedroom door shutting, very very quietly.

Jack Grantham was very nice to Hetty the next morning—nicer than he had given himself the trouble to be since they had gone to see the doctor.

They walked up to the village together, and went into several of the shops; and at the butcher's, he chaffed her so funnily about her ignorance of housekeeping, that everybody in the shop laughed aloud. And at last he waggishly exclaimed, "She's new to it, you know, my little wife. Why, we've only been married about a fortnight!" And he won the butcher's heart, too, by saying that he only liked English meat—no old dead stuff for him, even if it was Empire produce.

After they came home to the Old Bungalow he himself cooked the piece of undercut they had brought with them. And Hetty was taken aback, even felt really mortified, to find how well her hubby could cook.

"You'll find I can do most things, old girl," he said cheerfully, flattered by her surprise.

But after they had had and enjoyed their nice little meal he suddenly exclaimed, "I'm afraid I'll have to go away again this afternoon, ducky! I've got to meet a man over Arundel way, to look at a wine-cooler. They fetch a lot, when good."

"I did think you'd stay with me to-day," she said complainingly, and on the brink of tears. "It's awfully dull here, all by myself."

"Business must come first." he answered tartly. "You cheer

up, and remember that care killed the cat! I shan't be gone long this time. We might have a dip in the sea when I come back, and I'll hot you up a nice bath to-night! Now you'll like that?"

"Well, yes," she said, wiping her eyes, "I *shall* like that. I always had a good look at the bathroom before going into a new boarding-house; and till we came here I always had a nice hot bath every night. But won't heating the water give a lot of trouble?"

"Only trouble to me," he said gallantly. "And I'd do a good bit more for you than that, my dear, any day. By the way, the lady who lives at the third bungalow from here—her name's Jones—good old name—is coming to see you to-day. I said you'd be in to see her about three o'clock. I didn't think you'd want the bother of getting tea for her."

"I don't feel as if I want to see anyone," she said grumpily. But to that he replied sharply, "Nonsense! It's always a mistake not to get on with one's neighbours. And mind you give your hubby a good character!" And this time he gave her a really affectionate kiss.

She smiled—it was a more intelligent smile than her usual smile—and he said, quickly: "Hullo! What's the laugh about?"

"Only something I'm thinking of."

She had remembered, suddenly, his extraordinary antics of the night before; and long after he was gone, she went on smiling to herself, and feeling happier than she had felt for several days.

Mrs. Jones duly came in, and her coming did cheer Hetty up a bit, for Mrs. Jones told her new neighbour all about the local politics of the place. She explained that most of "the beachcombers," as they were locally styled, wanted to start some kind of co-operative arrangement about food. To do that would save a lot on every woman's household bills.

Now this was a point that Hetty not only understood, but keenly appreciated, and she promised to enlist her husband's sympathy with the scheme, explaining proudly that he was a very clever man—as to which indeed, she spoke more truth than she knew.

Mrs. Jones stayed a long time. Perhaps she was hoping for a cup of tea. But if so, she was disappointed. After she had gone, Hetty, who always found anything like a long-sustained conversation very tiring, lay back in one of the two shabby wicker chairs on the verandah, and fell fast asleep. And just as had been the case the night before, she must have begun dreaming of her

mother, for she awoke with a start to hear her mother's voice sounding quite near to her, and that familiar voice uttered what had once been such familiar words: *"Hetty, my dear, be careful. . . . Look where you're going, my child."*

She stood up, feeling a bit dazed, and turning, went into the bungalow. Then, in the lounge, there came over her such a funny feeling! It was as if something was inwardly urging her to the right, towards the place where stood the empty bath.

In Hetty's eyes the bath looked so odd and wrong, without any proper taps, and with its squat iron feet still swathed in straw and paper.

A stronger breeze than usual was blowing in from the beach, and tiny wisps of straw were flying all over the floor. Too bad of those three men not to have taken away all that stuff! She told herself that had she noticed this omission on their part, she would not have given them the shilling. There was one thing she could now occupy herself in doing—she could take away all that nasty straw and old paper. So, fetching a knife from the kitchen, she knelt down, rather heavily, and began sawing through the strong cords which bound the straw and paper round the nearest iron foot of the bath.

Though she was wide awake now, she still felt as if her mother was around; and though she knew it was only her fancy, she found it a most peculiar, disconcerting feeling.

Now Mrs. Mingle, unlike Hetty, had been a great one for reading, and it gave Mrs. Mingle's daughter quite a turn when she saw that the big sheet of crumpled paper she had just unwound from the iron foot of the bath was part of an old *News of the World,* her mother's favourite paper!

She took up the wide closely-printed sheet, and smoothed it out flat on the floor.

And then, all at once, Hetty began to laugh, though what was printed there, staring up at her, was really very sad, come to think of it:

"BRIDE DIES IN HER BATH

"Last Tuesday morning, at the Eastbourne Coroner's Court there was opened an inquest on Mary Anne Ludlow, the wife of John Ludlow, who was found dead in her bath. The circumstances were very sad, for Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow were only married three weeks ago.

"Dr. Pember, of 32 Marine Parade, gave evidence that he had attended deceased a week before her death. But she had only been

slightly indisposed, and there had been nothing really wrong with her. He had made a post-mortem examination, and he could but conclude that she had turned faint in the water, and that, slipping down in the bath, her head had become immersed, and so she had been suffocated. Many women, he added, allowed their bath-water to become a great deal too hot."

Hetty told herself, smiling, that she, too, liked a very hot bath. She must be careful not to have *her* bath-water too hot to-night. Just then there came a loud knock at the door, and she pulled herself up on to her feet by the edge of the bath. She was curiously inactive and heavy, for a woman of her age.

Opening the door, she saw that the postman stood there. It was the first time he had called at the Old Bungalow, since the Granthams had taken it.

"Mrs. Grantham?" he asked questioningly; and, saying "Yes," she held out her hand to see, with a slight feeling of misgiving, that it was a letter from the lawyer, Mr. Quin, sent on from the Canterbury bank.

Shutting the door, she opened the envelope.

Mr. Quin's letter was a short, rather dry, typewritten letter, marked "Private." The writer began by saying that he had been away on holiday and expressed surprise at the news of his client's marriage. He concluded by saying that he hoped she would find it convenient to come soon to London, as he wished to see her concerning the re-investment of a portion of her capital.

And then there came another knock at the door, and this time it was a telegraph-boy. As he held out the buff envelope: "It can't be for here," she said crossly.

"Aren't you Mrs. Grantham?"

"Why yes, I am," and she opened the telegram to find it was from her husband saying he couldn't be back till the morrow.

By now poor Hetty felt very much upset and flustered. She told herself that this behaviour was too bad of Jack—in fact really unkind. Still, two could play at that game! She wasn't going to stay in this queer place all by herself to-night.

Resentfully she decided that she would go to London to see Mr. Quin, this very afternoon. There was a nice boarding-house near the British Museum where they always found room for her. She could see Mr. Quin to-morrow morning, and be back here in the afternoon, probably well before her husband.

Slowly, deliberately she put on her best clothes, feeling it a pleasant sensation not to be made to hurry; and then, all at

once, she remembered that she must leave word she had gone. After all, her hubby might come home before her? And if he did, he might be very angry at finding her gone. Still, Mr. Quin was her own lawyer, and he wanted to see her about her own money. All the same, she might as well write her lord and master a nice letter, one, maybe, that would make him laugh? So cutting out that funny little paragraph, about the bride who had died in her bath, from the sheet of the *News of the World,* she took a piece of the nice shiny notepaper Jack Grantham always used, sat down at the one table in the lounge and wrote what for her was quite a long note:

"Thursday.

"My dear Jack,

"I am going up to London this afternoon to see Mr. Quin. He wants to see me about my money. I expect I'll be back to-morrow about six o'clock.

"Isn't this a funny bit I've cut out of an old paper? Having that bath here makes me think of it.

"Your affectionate wife,
"Henrietta Grantham."

She put the letter and the cutting into an envelope, and addressing it to "Mr. John Grantham," left it on the one table there, which she laboriously dragged into the middle of the room, so that he couldn't miss seeing the letter.

. . . . . .

The next morning Hetty's interview with Mr. Quin was on the whole quite a pleasant one. The old lawyer hadn't much to say after all, though he did scold her somewhat for not having let him know, before it took place, about her marriage. As for the business he had wanted to see her about, it was soon settled to both their satisfaction.

But no one was more surprised than was Mr. Quin—not even his client herself—when he ultimately learnt what had happened when Hetty went back to Sussex that same afternoon; for, astounding to relate, she had found the front door of the Old Bungalow bolted and barred against her, and her husband—gone!

What had happened soon became all too clear, even to the bewildered Hetty.

After coming back that same morning, Jack Grantham had

locked up the house, taking away not only all his own things, but, oddly enough, his wife's jewel-box along with him.

Then he had gone all round the village, leaving word with the various tradesmen, as well as with the house-agent, that when Mrs. Grantham returned from London, she would pay up and follow him. He had even had the bath moved back to the plumber's shop!

But though she did pay up everything, even on Mr. Quin's advice to the extra month's tenancy of that horrid bungalow, Hetty found it impossible to follow her husband, owing to the simple reason that he had left no address.

Much surprised and distressed, poor Hetty, again acting on Mr. Quin's advice, had costly advertisements inserted in the agony columns of all the daily papers. But they brought no news either of him, or from him. And, after a certain time had elapsed, for a reason that the old lawyer did not regard it as at all necessary to impart to his client, he urgently recommended that Hetty drop the name of Grantham, and call herself, instead, Mrs. Mingle, her dear mother's name.

And so it is that now, Hetty, known to those about her as Mrs. Mingle, is again leading a placid life, first in one nice boarding-house, and then in another.

As time goes on, the memories connected with her great adventure become fainter and fainter. But in her heart she is aware it is to that strange, and now dim, interlude, that she owes her solid satisfaction in what old-fashioned married ladies still call "brevet rank."

Baroness Orczy

THE REGENT'S PARK MURDER

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By this time Miss Polly Burton had become quite accustomed to her extraordinary *vis-à-vis* in the corner.

He was always there, when she arrived, in the selfsame corner, dressed in one of his remarkable check tweed suits; he seldom said good morning, and invariably when she appeared he began to fidget with increased nervousness, with some tattered and knotty piece of string.

"Were you ever interested in the Regent's Park murder?" he asked her one day.

Polly replied that she had forgotten most of the particulars connected with that curious murder, but that she fully remembered the stir and flutter it had caused in a certain section of London Society.

"The racing and gambling set, particularly, you mean," he said. "All the persons implicated in the murder, directly or indirectly, were of the type commonly called 'Society men,' or 'men about town,' whilst the Harewood Club in Hanover Square, round which centred all the scandal in connection with the murder, was one of the smartest clubs in London.

"Probably the doings of the Harewood Club, which was essentially a gambling club, would for ever have remained 'officially' absent from the knowledge of the police authorities but for the murder in the Regent's Park and the revelations which came to light in connection with it.

"I dare say you know the quiet square which lies between Portland Place and the Regent's Park and is called Park Crescent at its south end, and subsequently Park Square East and West. The Marylebone Road, with all its heavy traffic, cuts straight across the large square and its pretty gardens, but the latter are connected together by a tunnel under the road; and of course you must remember that the new tube station in the south portion of the Square had not yet been planned.

"February 6th, 1907, was a very foggy night, nevertheless Mr. Aaron Cohen, of 30, Park Square West, at two o'clock in the morning, having finally pocketed the heavy winnings which he had just swept off the green table of the Harewood Club, started to walk home alone. An hour later most of the inhabitants of Park Square West were aroused from their peaceful slumbers by the sounds of a violent altercation in the road. A man's angry voice was heard shouting violently for a minute or two, and was followed immediately by frantic screams of 'Police' and 'Murder.' Then there was the double sharp report of firearms, and nothing more.

"The fog was very dense, and, as you no doubt have experienced yourself, it is very difficult to locate sound in a fog. Nevertheless, not more than a minute or two had elapsed before Constable F 18, the point policeman at the corner of Marylebone Road, arrived on the scene, and, having first of all whistled for any of his comrades on the beat, began to grope his way about

in the fog, more confused than effectually assisted by contradictory directions from the inhabitants of the houses close by, who were nearly falling out of the upper windows as they shouted out to the constable.

"'By the railings, policeman.'

"'Higher up the road.'

"'No, lower down.'

"'It was on this side of the pavement I am sure.'

"'No, the other.'

"At last it was another policeman, F 22, who, turning into Park Square West from the north side, almost stumbled upon the body of a man lying on the pavement with his head against the railings of the Square. By this time quite a little crowd of people from the different houses in the road had come down, curious to know what had actually happened.

"The policeman turned the strong light of his bull's-eye lantern on the unfortunate man's face.

"'It looks as if he had been strangled, don't it?' he murmured to his comrade.

"And he pointed to the swollen tongue, the eyes half out of their sockets, bloodshot, and congested, the purple, almost black, hue of the face.

"At this point one of the spectators, more callous to horrors, peered curiously into the dead man's face. He uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"'Why, surely, it's Mr. Cohen from No. 30!'

"The mention of a name familiar down the length of the street had caused two or three other men to come forward and to look more closely into the horribly distorted mask of the murdered man.

"'Our next-door neighbour, undoubtedly,' asserted Mr. Ellison, a young barrister, residing at No. 31.

"'What in the world was he doing this foggy night all alone, and on foot?' asked somebody else.

"'He usually came home very late. I fancy he belonged to some gambling club in town. I dare say he couldn't get a cab to bring him out here. Mind you, I don't know much about him. We only knew him to nod to.'

"'Poor beggar! it looks almost like an old-fashioned case of garrotting.'

"'Anyway, the blackguardly murderer, whoever he was, wanted to make sure he had killed his man!' added Constable

F 18, as he picked up an object from the pavement. 'Here's the revolver, with two cartridges missing. You gentlemen heard the report just now?'

" 'He don't seem to have hit him though. The poor bloke was strangled, no doubt.'

" 'And tried to shoot at his assailant, obviously,' asserted the young barrister with authority.

" 'If he succeeded in hitting the brute, there might be a chance of tracing the way he went.'

" 'But not in the fog.'

"Soon, however, the appearance of the inspector, detective, and medical officer, who had quickly been informed of the tragedy, put an end to further discussion.

"The bell at No. 30 was rung, and the servants—all four of them women—were asked to look at the body.

"Amidst tears of horror and screams of fright, they all recognised in the murdered man their master, Mr. Aaron Cohen. He was therefore conveyed to his own room pending the coroner's inquest.

"The police had a pretty difficult task, you will admit; there were so very few indications to go by, and at first literally no clue.

"The inquest revealed practically nothing. Very little was known in the neighbourhood about Mr. Aaron Cohen and his affairs. His female servants did not even know the name or whereabout of the various clubs he frequented.

"He had an office in Throgmorton Street and went to business every day. He dined at home, and sometimes had friends to dinner. When he was alone he invariably went to the club, where he stayed until the small hours of the morning.

"The night of the murder he had gone out at about nine o'clock. That was the last his servants had seen of him. With regard to the revolver, all four servants swore positively that they had never seen it before, and that, unless Mr. Cohen had bought it that very day, it did not belong to their master.

"Beyond that, no trace whatever of the murderer had been found, but on the morning after the crime a couple of keys linked together by a short metal chain were found close to a gate at the opposite end of the Square, that which immediately faced Portland Place. These were proved to be, firstly, Mr. Cohen's latch-key, and, secondly, his gate-key of the Square.

"It was therefore presumed that the murderer, having accomplished his fell design and ransacked his victim's pockets, had found the keys and made good his escape by slipping into the Square, cutting under the tunnel, and out again by the further gate. He then took the precaution not to carry the keys with him any further, but threw them away and disappeared in the fog.

"The jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, and the police were put on their mettle to discover the unknown and daring murderer. The result of their investigations, conducted with marvellous skill by Mr. William Fisher, led, about a week after the crime, to the sensational arrest of one of London's smartest young bucks.

"The case Mr. Fisher had got up against the accused briefly amounted to this:

"On the night of February 6th, soon after midnight, play began to run very high at the Harewood Club, in Hanover Square. Mr. Aaron Cohen held the bank at roulette against some twenty or thirty of his friends, mostly young fellows with no wits and plenty of money. 'The Bank' was winning heavily, and it appears that this was the third consecutive night on which Mr. Aaron Cohen had gone home richer by several hundreds than he had been at the start of play.

"Young John Ashley, who is the son of a very worthy county gentleman who is M.F.H. somewhere in the Midlands, was losing heavily, and in his case also it appears that it was the third consecutive night that Fortune had turned her face against him.

"Remember," continued the man in the corner, "that when I tell you all these details and facts, I am giving you the combined evidence of several witnesses, which it took many days to collect and to classify.

"It appears that young Mr. Ashley, though very popular in society, was generally believed to be in what is vulgarly termed 'low water'; up to his eyes in debt, and mortally afraid of his dad, whose younger son he was, and who had on one occasion threatened to ship him off to Australia with a £5 note in his pocket if he made any further extravagant calls upon his paternal indulgence.

"It was also evident to all John Ashley's many companions that the worthy M.F.H. held the purse-strings in a very tight grip. The young man, bitten with the desire to cut a smart figure in the circles in which he moved, had often recourse to the varying

fortunes which now and again smiled upon him across the green tables in the Harewood Club.

"Be that as it may, the general consensus of opinion at the Club was that young Ashley had changed his last 'pony' before he sat down to a turn of roulette with Aaron Cohen on that particular night of February 6th.

"It appears that all his friends, conspicuous among whom was Mr. Walter Hatherell, tried their very best to dissuade him from pitting his luck against that of Cohen, who had been having a most unprecedented run of good fortune. But young Ashley, heated with wine, exasperated at his own bad luck, would listen to no one; he tossed one £5 note after another on the board, he borrowed from those who would lend, then played on parole for a while. Finally, at half-past one in the morning, after a run of nineteen on the red, the young man found himself without a penny in his pockets, and owing a debt—a gambling debt—a debt of honour of £1,500 to Mr. Aaron Cohen.

"Now we must render this much maligned gentleman that justice which was persistently denied to him by press and public alike; it was positively asserted by all those present that Mr. Cohen himself repeatedly tried to induce young Mr. Ashley to give up playing. He himself was in a delicate position in the matter, as he was the winner, and once or twice the taunt had risen to the young man's lips, accusing the holder of the bank of the wish to retire on a competence before the break in his luck.

"Mr. Aaron Cohen, smoking the best of Havanas, had finally shrugged his shoulders and said: 'As you please!'

"But at half-past one he had had enough of the player who always lost and never paid—never could pay, so Mr. Cohen probably believed. He therefore at that hour refused to accept Mr. John Ashley's 'promissory' stakes any longer. A very few heated words ensued, quickly checked by the management, who are ever on the alert to avoid the least suspicion of scandal.

"In the meanwhile Mr. Hatherell, with great good sense, persuaded young Ashley to leave the Club and all its temptations and go home; if possible to bed.

"The friendship of the two young men, which was very well known in society, consisted chiefly, it appears, in Walter Hatherell being the willing companion and helpmeet of John Ashley in his mad and extravagant pranks. But to-night the latter, apparently tardily sobered by his terrible and heavy losses, allowed

himself to be led away by his friend from the scene of his disasters. It was then about twenty minutes to two.

"Here the situation becomes interesting," continued the man in the corner in his nervous way. "No wonder that the police interrogated at least a dozen witnesses before they were quite satisfied that every statement was conclusively proved.

"Walter Hatherell, after about ten minutes' absence, that is to say at ten minutes to two, returned to the club room. In reply to several inquiries, he said that he had parted with his friend at the corner of New Bond Street, since he seemed anxious to be alone, and that Ashley said he would take a turn down Piccadilly before going home—he thought a walk would do him good.

"At two o'clock or thereabouts Mr. Aaron Cohen, satisfied with his evening's work, gave up his position at the bank and, pocketing his heavy winnings, started on his homeward walk, while Mr. Walter Hatherell left the club half an hour later.

"At three o'clock precisely the cries of 'Murder' and the report of fire-arms were heard in Park Square West, and Mr. Aaron Cohen was found strangled outside the garden railings."

"Now at first sight the murder in the Regent's Park appeared both to police and public as one of those silly, clumsy crimes, obviously the work of a novice, and absolutely purposeless, seeing that it could but inevitably lead its perpetrators, without any difficulty, to the gallows.

"You see, a motive had been established. 'Seek him whom the crime benefits,' say our French *confrères*. But there was something more than that.

" 'Constable James Funnell, on his beat, turned from Portland Place into Park Crescent a few minutes after he had heard the clock at Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone, strike half-past two. The fog at that moment was perhaps not quite so dense as it was later on in the morning, and the policeman saw two gentlemen in overcoats and top-hats leaning arm in arm against the railings of the Square, close to the gate. He could not, of course, distinguish their faces because of the fog, but he heard one of them saying to the other:

" 'It is but a question of time, Mr. Cohen. I know my father will pay the money for me, and you will lose nothing by waiting.'

"To this the other apparently made no reply, and the constable passed on; when he returned to the same spot, after having

walked over his beat, the two gentlemen had gone, but later on it was near this very gate that the two keys referred to at the inquest had been found.

"Another interesting fact," added the man in the corner, with one of those sarcastic smiles of his which Polly could not quite explain, "was the finding of the revolver upon the scene of the crime. That revolver, shown to Mr. Ashley's valet, was sworn to by him as being the property of his master.

"All these facts made, of course, a very remarkable, so far quite unbroken, chain of circumstantial evidence against Mr. John Ashley. No wonder, therefore, that the police, thoroughly satisfied with Mr. Fisher's work and their own, applied for a warrant against the young man, and arrested him in his rooms in Clarges Street exactly a week after the committal of the crime.

"As a matter of fact, you know, experience has invariably taught me that when a murderer seems particularly foolish and clumsy, and proofs against him seem particularly damning, that is the time when the police should be most guarded against pitfalls.

"Now in this case, if John Ashley had indeed committed the murder in Regent's Park in the manner suggested by the police, he would have been a criminal in more senses than one, for idiocy of that kind is to my mind worse than many crimes.

"The prosecution brought its witnesses up in triumphal array one after another. There were the members of the Harewood Club—who had seen the prisoner's excited condition after his heavy gambling losses to Mr. Aaron Cohen; there was Mr. Hatherell, who, in spite of his friendship for Ashley, was bound to admit that he had parted from him at the corner of Bond Street at twenty minutes to two, and had not seen him again till his return home at five a.m.

"Then came the evidence of Arthur Chipps, John Ashley's valet. It proved of a very sensational character.

"He deposed that on the night in question his master came home at about ten minutes to two. Chipps had then not yet gone to bed. Five minutes later Mr. Ashley went out again, telling his valet not to sit up for him. Chipps could not say at what time either of the young gentlemen had come home.

"That short visit home—presumably to fetch the revolver—was thought to be very important, and Mr. John Ashley's friends felt that his case was practically hopeless.

"The valet's evidence and that of James Funnell, the con-

stable, who had overheard the conversation near the park railings, were certainly the two most damning proofs against the accused. I assure you I was having a rare old time that day. There were two faces in court to watch which was the greatest treat I had had for many a day. One of these was Mr. John Ashley's.

"Here's his photo—short, dark, dapper, a little 'racy' in style, but otherwise he looks a son of a well-to-do farmer. He was very quiet and placid in court, and addressed a few words now and again to his solicitor. He listened gravely, and with an occasional shrug of the shoulders, to the recital of the crime, such as the police had reconstructed it, before an excited and horrified audience.

"Mr. John Ashley, driven to madness and frenzy by terrible financial difficulties, had first of all gone home in search of a weapon, then waylaid Mr. Aaron Cohen somewhere on that gentleman's way home. The young man had begged for delay. Mr. Cohen perhaps was obdurate; but Ashley followed him with his importunities almost to his door.

"There, seeing his creditor determined at last to cut short the painful interview, he had seized the unfortunate man at an unguarded moment from behind, and strangled him; then, fearing that his dastardly work was not fully accomplished, he had shot twice at the already dead body, missing it both times from sheer nervous excitement. The murderer then must have emptied his victim's pockets, and, finding the key of the garden, thought that it would be a safe way of evading capture by cutting across the squares, under the tunnel, and so through the more distant gate which faced Portland Place.

"The loss of the revolver was one of those unforeseen accidents which a retributive Providence places in the path of the miscreant, delivering him by his own act of folly into the hands of human justice.

"Mr. John Ashley, however, did not appear the least bit impressed by the recital of his crime. He had not engaged the services of one of the most eminent lawyers, expert at extracting contradictions from witnesses by skilful cross-examinations—oh, dear me, no! he had been contented with those of a dull, prosy, very second-rate limb of the law, who, as he called his witnesses, was completely innocent of any desire to create a sensation.

"He rose quietly from his seat, and, amidst breathless silence, called the first of three witnesses on behalf of his client. He

called three—but he could have produced twelve—gentlemen, members of the Ashton Club in Great Portland Street, all of whom swore that at three o'clock on the morning of February 6th, that is to say, at the very moment when the cries of 'Murder' roused the inhabitants of Park Square West, and the crime was being committed, Mr. John Ashley was sitting quietly in the club-rooms of the Ashton playing bridge with the three witnesses. He had come in a few minutes before three—as the hall porter of the Club testified—and stayed for about an hour and a half.

"I need not tell you that this undoubted, this fully proved, *alibi* was a positive bomb-shell in the stronghold of the prosecution. The most accomplished criminal could not possibly be in two places at once, and though the Ashton Club transgresses in many ways against the gambling laws of our very moral country, yet its members belong to the best, most unimpeachable classes of society. Mr. Ashley had been seen and spoken to at the very moment of the crime by at least a dozen gentlemen whose testimony was absolutly above suspicion.

"Mr. John Ashley's conduct throughout this astonishing phase of the inquiry remained perfectly calm and correct. It was no doubt the consciousness of being able to prove his innocence with such absolute conclusion that had steadied his nerves throughout the proceedings.

"His answers to the magistrate were clear and simple, even on the ticklish subject of the revolver.

" 'I left the club, sir,' he explained, 'fully determined to speak with Mr. Cohen alone in order to ask him for a delay in the settlement of my debt to him. You will understand that I should not care to do this in the presence of other gentlemen. I went home for a minute or two—not in order to fetch a revolver, as the police assert, for I always carry a revolver about with me in foggy weather—but in order to see if a very important business letter had come for me in my absence.

" 'Then I went out again, and met Mr. Aaron Cohen not far from the Harewood Club. I walked the greater part of the way with him, and our conversation was of the most amicable character. We parted at the top of Portland Place, near the gate of the Square, where the policeman saw us. Mr. Cohen then had the intention of cutting across the Square, as being a shorter way to his own house. I thought the Square looked dark and dangerous in the fog, especially as Mr. Cohen was carrying a large sum of money.

"'We had a short discussion on the subject, and finally I persuaded him to take my revolver, as I was going home only through very frequented streets, and moreover carried nothing that was worth stealing. After a little demur Mr. Cohen accepted the loan of my revolver, and that is how it came to be found on the actual scene of the crime; finally I parted from Mr. Cohen a very few minutes after I had heard the church clock striking a quarter before three. I was at the Oxford Street end of Great Portland Street at five minutes to three, and it takes at least ten minutes to walk from where I was to the Ashton Club.'

"This explanation was all the more credible, mind you, because the question of the revolver had never been very satisfactorily explained by the prosecution. A man who has effectually strangled his victim would not discharge two shots of his revolver for, apparently, no other purpose than that of rousing the attention of the nearest passer-by. It was far more likely that it was Mr. Cohen who shot—perhaps wildly into the air, when suddenly attacked from behind. Mr. Ashley's explanation therefore was not only plausible, it was the only possible one.

"You will understand therefore how it was that, after nearly half an hour's examination, the magistrate, the police, and the public were alike pleased to proclaim that the accused left the court without a stain upon his character."

"Yes," interrupted Polly eagerly, since, for once, her acumen had been at least as sharp as his, "but suspicion of that horrible crime only shifted its taint from one friend to another, and, of course, I know——"

"But that's just it," he quietly interrupted, "you don't know —Mr. Walter Hatherell, of course, you mean. So did every one else at once. The friend, weak and willing, committing a crime on behalf of his cowardly, yet more assertive friend who had tempted him to evil. It was a good theory; and was held pretty generally, I fancy, even by the police.

"I say 'even' because they worked really hard in order to build up a case against young Hatherell, but the great difficulty was that of time. At the hour when the policeman had seen the two men outside Park Square together, Walter Hatherell was still sitting in the Harewood Club, which he never left until twenty minutes to two. Had he wished to waylay and rob Aaron Cohen he would not have waited surely till the time when presumably the latter would already have reached home.

"Moreover, twenty minutes was an incredibly short time in which to walk from Hanover Square to Regent's Park without the chance of cutting across the squares, to look for a man, whose whereabouts you could not determine to within twenty yards or so, to have an argument with him, murder him, and ransack his pockets. And then there was the total absence of motive."

"But——" said Polly meditatively, for she remembered now that the Regent's Park murder, as it had been popularly called, was one of those which had remained as impenetrable a mystery as any other crime had ever been in the annals of the police.

The man in the corner cocked his funny bird-like head well on one side and looked at her, highly amused evidently at her perplexity.

"You do not see how that murder was committed?" he asked with a grin.

Polly was bound to admit that she did not.

"If you had happened to have been in Mr. John Ashley's predicament," he persisted, "you do not see how you could conveniently have done away with Mr. Aaron Cohen, pocketed his winnings, and then led the police of your country entirely by the nose, by proving an indisputable *alibi*?"

"I could not arrange conveniently," she retorted, "to be in two different places half a mile apart at one and the same time."

"No! I quite admit that you could not do this unless you also had a friend——"

"A friend? But you say——"

"I say that I admired Mr. John Ashley, for his was the head which planned the whole thing, but he could not have accomplished the fascinating and terrible drama without the help of willing and able hands."

"Even then——" she protested.

"Point number one," he began excitedly, fidgeting with his inevitable piece of string. "John Ashley and his friend Walter Hatherell leave the club together, and together decide on the plan of campaign. Hatherell returns to the club, and Ashley goes to fetch the revolver—the revolver which played such an important part in the drama, but not the part assigned to it by the police. Now try to follow Ashley closely, as he dogs Aaron Cohen's footsteps. Do you believe that he entered into conversation with him? That he walked by his side? That he asked for delay? No! He sneaked behind him and caught him by the throat,

as the garrotters used to do in the fog. Cohen was apoplectic, and Ashley is young and powerful. Moreover, he meant to kill——"

"But the two men talked together outside the Square gates," protested Polly, "one of whom was Cohen, and the other Ashley."

"Pardon me," he said, jumping up in his seat like a monkey on a stick, "there were not two men talking outside the Square gates. According to the testimony of James Funnell, the constable, two men were leaning arm in arm against the railings and *one* man was talking."

"Then you think that——"

"At the hour when James Funnell heard Holy Trinity clock striking half-past two Aaron Cohen was already dead. Look how simple the whole thing is," he added eagerly, "and how easy after that—easy, but oh, dear me! how wonderfully, how stupendously clever. As soon as James Funnell has passed on, John Ashley, having opened the gate, lifts the body of Aaron Cohen in his arms and carries him across the Square. The Square is deserted, of course, but the way is easy enough, and we must presume that Ashley had been in it before. Anyway, there was no fear of meeting any one.

"In the meantime Hatherell has left the club: as fast as his athletic legs can carry him he rushes along Oxford Street and Portland Place. It had been arranged between the two miscreants that the Square gate should be left on the latch.

"Close on Ashley's heels now, Hatherell too cuts across the Square, and reaches the further gate in good time to give his confederate a hand in disposing the body against the railings. Then, without another instant's delay, Ashley runs back across the gardens, straight to the Ashton Club, throwing away the keys of the dead man, on the very spot where he had made it a point of being seen and heard by a passer-by.

"Hatherell gives his friend six or seven minutes' start, then he begins the altercation which lasts two or three minutes, and finally rouses the neighbourhood with cries of 'Murder' and report of pistol in order to establish that the crime was committed at the hour when its perpetrator has already made out an indisputable *alibi*.

"I don't know what you think of it all, of course," added the funny creature as he fumbled for his coat and his gloves, "but I call the planning of that murder—on the part of novices, mind you—one of the cleverest pieces of strategy I have ever come

across. It is one of those cases where there is no possibility whatever now of bringing the crime home to its perpetrator or his abettor. They have not left a single proof behind them; they foresaw everything, and each acted his part with a coolness and courage which, applied to a great and good cause, would have made fine statesmen of them both.

"As it is, I fear, they are just a pair of young blackguards, who have escaped human justice, and have only deserved the full and ungrudging admiration of yours very sincerely."

He had gone. Polly wanted to call him back, but his meagre person was no longer visible through the glass door. There were many things she would have wished to ask of him—what were his proofs, his facts? His were theories, after all, and yet, somehow, she felt that he had solved once again one of the darkest mysteries of great criminal London.

John Rhode

THE ELUSIVE BULLET

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"By the way, Professor, there's something in the evening papers that might interest you," said Inspector Hanslet, handing over as he spoke the copy he had been holding in his hand. "There you are, 'Prominent City Merchant found dead.' Read it, it sounds quite interesting."

Dr. Priestley adjusted his spectacles and began to read the paragraph. The Professor and myself, Harold Merefield, who had been his secretary for a couple of years, had been sitting in the study of Dr. Priestley's house in Westbourne Terrace, one fine June evening after dinner, when Inspector Hanslet had been announced. The Inspector was an old friend of ours, who availed himself of the Professor's hobby, which was the mathematical detection of crime, to discuss with him any investigations upon which he happened to be engaged. He had just finished giving the Professor an outline of a recent burglary case, over which the police had confessed themselves puzzled, and had risen to go, when the item in the newspaper occurred to him.

"This does not appear to me to be particularly interesting," said the Professor. "It merely states that on the arrival of the 3.20 train this afternoon at Tilbury station a porter, in examining the carriages, found the dead body of a man, since identified as a Mr. Farquharson, lying in a corner of a first class carriage. This Mr. Farquharson appears to have met his death through a blow on the side of the head, although no weapon capable of inflicting such a blow has so far been found. I can only suggest that if the facts are as reported, there are at least a dozen theories which could be made to fit in with them."

"Such as?" enquired Hanslet tentatively.

The Professor frowned. "You know perfectly well, Inspector, that I most strongly deprecate all conjecture," he replied severely. "Conjecture, unsupported by a thorough examination of facts, has been responsible for more than half the errors made by mankind throughout the ages. But, to demonstrate my meaning, I will outline a couple of theories which fit in with all the reported facts. Mr. Farquharson may have been struck by an assailant who left the train before its arrival at Tilbury, and who disposed of the weapon in some way. On the other hand, he may have leant out of the window, and been struck by some object at the side of the line, or even by a passing train, if he was at the right hand side of the carriage, looking in the direction in which the train was going. Of course, as I wish to emphasize, a knowledge of *all* the facts, not only those contained in this brief paragraph, would probably render both these theories untenable."

Hanslet smiled. He knew well enough from experience the Professor's passion for facts and his horror of conjecture.

"Well, I don't suppose the case will come my way," he said as he turned towards the door. "But if it does I'll let you know what transpires. I shouldn't wonder if we know the whole story in a day or two. It looks simple enough. Well, good-night, sir."

The Professor waited till the front door had closed behind him. "I have always remarked that Hanslet's difficulties are comparatively easy of solution, but that what he calls simple problems completely baffle his powers of reasoning. I should not be surprised if we heard from him again very shortly."

As usual the Professor was right. Hanslet's first visit had been on Saturday evening. On the following Tuesday, at about the same time, he called again, with a peculiarly triumphant expression on his face.

"You remember that Farquharson business, don't you, Pro-

fessor?" he began without preliminary. "Well, it did come my way, after all. The Essex police called Scotland Yard in, and I was put on to it. I've solved the whole thing in under forty-eight hours. Not a bad piece of work, eh? Mr. Farquharson was murdered by——"

Dr. Priestley held up his hand protestingly. "My dear Inspector, I am not the least concerned with the murderer of this Mr. Farquharson. As I have repeatedly told you, my interest in these matters is purely theoretical, and confined to the processes of deduction. You are beginning your story at the wrong end. If you wish me to listen to it, you must first tell me the full facts, then explain the course of your investigations, step by step."

"Very well, sir," replied Hanslet, somewhat crestfallen. "The first fact I learnt was how Farquharson was killed. It appeared at first sight that he had been struck a terrific blow by some weapon like a pole-axe. There was a wound about two inches across on the right side of his head. But, at the post-mortem, this was found to have been caused by a bullet from an ordinary service rifle, which was found imbedded in his brain."

"Ah!" remarked the Professor. "A somewhat unusual instrument of murder, surely? What position did the body occupy in the carriage when it was found?"

"Oh, in the right hand corner, facing the engine, I believe," replied Hanslet impatiently. "But that's of no importance, as you'll see. The next step, obviously, was to find out something about Farquharson, and why anyone should want to murder him. The discovery of a motive is a very great help in an investigation like this. Farquharson lived with his daughter in a biggish house near a place called Stanford-le-Hope, on the line between Tilbury and Southend. On Saturday last he left his office, which is close to Fenchurch Street station, about one o'clock. He lunched at a restaurant near by, and caught the two-fifteen at Fenchurch Street. As this was the train in which his dead body was found, I need hardly detail the enquiries by which I discovered these facts."

The Professor nodded. "I am prepared to take your word for them," he said.

"Very well, now let us come to the motive," continued Hanslet. "Farquharson was in business with his nephew, a rather wild young fellow named Robert Halliday. It seems that this young man's mother, Farquharson's sister, had a good deal of money in the business, and was very anxious that his son should carry it on

after Farquharson's death. She died a couple of years ago, leaving rather a curious will, by which all her money was to remain in her brother's business, and was to revert to her son only at her brother's death."

The Professor rubbed his hands. "Ah, the indispensable motive begins to appear!" he exclaimed with a sarcastic smile. "I am sure that you feel that no further facts are necessary, Inspector. It follows of course that young Halliday murdered his uncle to secure the money. You described him as a wild young man, I think? Really, the evidence is most damning!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh at me, Professor," replied Hanslet indignantly. "I'll admit that you've given me a line on things that I couldn't find for myself, often enough. But in this case there's no possible shadow of doubt about what happened. What would you say if I told you that Halliday actually travelled in the very train in which his uncle's body was found?"

"Speaking without a full knowledge of the facts, I should say that this rather tended to establish his innocence," said the Professor gravely.

Hanslet winked knowingly. "Ah, but that's by no means all," he replied. "Halliday is a Territorial, and he left London on Saturday afternoon in uniform, and carrying a rifle. It seems that although he's very keen, he's a shocking bad marksman, and a member of a sort of awkward squad which goes down occasionally to Purfleet ranges to practise. Purfleet is a station between London and Tilbury. Halliday got out there, fired a number of rounds, and returned to London in the evening."

"Dear, dear, I'm sorry for that young man," remarked the Professor. "First we have a motive, then an opportunity. Of course, he travelled in the same carriage as his uncle, levelled his musket at his head, inflicted a fearful wound and decamped. Why, there's hardly a weak link in the whole chain."

"It wasn't quite as simple as that," replied Hanslet patiently. "He certainly didn't travel in the same carriage as his uncle, since that very morning they had quarrelled violently. Farquharson, who was rather a strict old boy, didn't approve of his nephew's ways. Not that I can find out much against him, but he's a bit of a young blood, and his uncle didn't like it. He travelled third class, and swears that he didn't know his uncle was on the train."

"Oh, you have interviewed him already, have you?" said the Professor quietly.

"I have," replied Hanslet. "His story is that he nearly missed

the train, jumped into it at the last moment, in fact. Somewhere after Barking he found himself alone, and that's all he told me. When I asked him what he was doing scrambling along the footboard outside the train between Dagenham and Rainham, he became very confused, and explained that on putting his head out of the window he had seen another member of the awkward squad a few carriages away, and made up his mind to join him. He gave me the man's name, and when I saw him he confirmed Halliday's story."

"Really, Inspector, your methods are masterly," said the Professor. "How did you know that he had been on the footboard?"

"A man working on the line had seen a soldier in uniform, with a rifle slung over his back, in this position," replied Hanslet triumphantly.

"And you immediately concluded that this man must be Halliday," commented the Professor. "Well, guesses must hit the truth sometimes, I suppose. What exactly is your theory of the crime?"

"It seems plain enough," replied Hanslet. "Halliday had watched his uncle enter the train, then jumped into a carriage close to his. At a predetermined spot he clambered along with his loaded rifle, shot him through the window, then, to avert suspicion, joined his friend, whom he had also seen enter the train, a little further on. It's as plain as a pikestaff to me."

"So it appears," remarked the Professor drily. "What steps do you propose to take in the matter?"

"I propose to arrest Halliday at the termination of the inquest," replied Hanslet complacently.

The Professor made no reply to this for several seconds. "I think it would be to everybody's advantage if you consulted me again before doing so," he said at last.

A cloud passed for an instant over Hanslet's face. "I will, if you think it would do any good," he replied. "But you must see for yourself that I have enough evidence to secure a conviction from any jury."

"That is just what disquiets me," returned the Professor quickly. "You cannot expect the average juryman to have an intelligence superior to yours, you know. I have your promise?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied Hanslet rather huffily. He changed the subject abruptly, and a few minutes later he rose and left the house.

In the course of our normal routine I forgot the death of Mr. Farquharson entirely. It was not until the following afternoon,

when Mary the parlourmaid entered the study with the announcement that a Miss Farquharson had called and begged that she might see the Professor immediately, that the matter recurred to me.

"Miss Farquharson!" I exclaimed. "Why, that must be the daughter of the fellow who was murdered the other day. Hanslet said he had a daughter, you remember."

"The balance of probability would appear to favour that theory," replied the Professor acidly. "Yes, I'll see her. Show Miss Farquharson in, please, Mary."

Miss Farquharson came in, and the Professor greeted her with his usual courtesy. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" he enquired.

Miss Farquharson hesitated a moment or two before she replied. She was tall and fair, dressed in deep mourning, with an elusive prettiness which I, at least, found most attractive. And even before she spoke, I guessed something of the truth from the flush which suffused her face at the Professor's question.

"I'm afraid you may think this an unpardonable intrusion," she said at last. "The truth is that Bob—Mr. Halliday—who is my cousin, has heard of you and begged me to come and see you."

The Professor frowned. He hated his name becoming known in connection with any of the investigations which he undertook, but in spite of all his efforts, many people had come to know of his hobby. Miss Farquharson took his frown for a sign of disapproval, and continued with an irresistible tone of pleading in her voice.

"It was only as a last hope I came to you," she said. "It's all so awful that I feel desperate. I expect you know that my father was found dead last Saturday in a train at Tilbury, while he was on his way home?"

The Professor nodded. "I am aware of some of the facts," he replied non-committally. "I need not trouble you to repeat them. But in what way can I be of assistance to you?"

"It's too terrible!" she exclaimed with a sob. "The police suspect Bob of having murdered him. They haven't said so, but they have been asking him all sorts of dreadful questions. Bob thought perhaps you might be able to do something——"

Her voice tailed away hopelessly under the Professor's unwinking gaze.

"My dear young lady, I am not a magician," he replied. "I

may as well tell you that I have seen Inspector Hanslet, who has what he considers a convincing case against your cousin."

"But you don't believe it, do you, Doctor Priestley?" interrupted Miss Farquharson eagerly.

"I can only accept the Inspector's statements as he gave them to me," replied the Professor. "I know nothing of the case beyond what he has told me. Perhaps you would allow me to ask you a few questions?"

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "I'll tell you everything I can."

The Professor inclined his head with a gesture of thanks. "Was your father in the habit of travelling by the two-fifteen train from Fenchurch Street on Saturday afternoons?"

"No," replied Miss Farquharson with decision. "Only when he was kept later than usual at the office. His usual custom was to come home to a late lunch."

"I see. Now, can you tell me the reason for the quarrel between him and your cousin?"

This time Miss Farquharson's reply was not so prompt. She lowered her head so that we could not see her face, and kept silence for a moment. Then, as though she had made up her mind, she spoke suddenly.

"I see no harm in telling you. As a matter of fact, Bob and I have been in love with one another for a long time, and Bob decided to tell my father on Saturday morning. Father was rather old-fashioned, and he didn't altogether approve of Bob. Not that there was any harm in anything he did, but Father couldn't understand that a young man likes to amuse himself. There was quite a scene when Bob told him, and Father refused to hear anything about it until Bob had reformed, as he put it. But I know that Bob didn't kill him," she concluded entreatingly. "It's impossible for anybody who knew him to believe he could. You don't believe it, do you?"

"No, I do not believe it," replied the Professor slowly. "If it is any consolation to you and Mr. Halliday, I may tell you in confidence that I never have believed it. When is the inquest to be?"

A look of deep thankfulness overspread her features. "I am more grateful to you than I can say, Doctor Priestley," she said earnestly. "The inquest? On Saturday morning. Will you be there?"

The Professor shook his head. "No, I shall not be there," he replied. "You see, it is not my business. But I shall take steps before then to make certain enquiries. I do not wish to raise your

hopes unduly, but it is possible that I may be able to divert suspicion from Mr. Halliday. More than that I cannot say."

Tears of thankfulness came to her eyes. "I can't tell you what this means to Bob and me," she said. "He has been terribly distressed. He quite understands that things look very black against him, and he cannot suggest who could have wanted to kill my father. Father hadn't an enemy in the world, poor dear."

"You are sure of that?" remarked the Professor.

"Quite," she replied positively. "I knew every detail of his life, he never hid the smallest thing from me."

And after a further short and unimportant conversation she took her leave of us.

The Professor sat silent for some minutes after her departure. "Poor girl!" he said at last. "To lose her father so tragically, and then to see the man she loves accused of his murder! We must see what we can do to help her, Harold. Get me the one-inch map of the country between London and Tilbury, and a time-table of the Southend trains."

I hastened to obey him, and for an hour or more he pored over the map, working upon it with a rule and a protractor. At the end of this period he looked up and spoke abruptly.

"This is remarkably interesting, more so than I imagined at first it would be. Run out and buy me the sheets of the six-inch survey which cover Rainham and Purfleet. I think we shall need them."

I bought the maps he required and returned with them. For the rest of the day he busied himself with these, and it was not until late in the evening that he spoke to me again.

"Really, my boy, this problem is beginning to interest me," he said. "There are many points about it which are distinctly baffling. We must examine the country on the spot. There is a train to Purfleet, I see, at ten-thirty to-morrow morning."

"Have you formed any theory, sir?" I enquired eagerly. The vision of Miss Farquharson, and her conviction of her cousin's innocence, had impressed me in her favour.

The Professor scowled at me. "How often am I to tell you that facts are all that matter?" he replied. "Our journey to-morrow will be for the purpose of ascertaining facts. Until we know these, it would be waste of time to indulge in conjecture."

He did not mention the subject again until the next morning, when we were seated in the train to Purfleet. He had chosen an empty first-class carriage, and himself took the right hand corner

facing the engine. He said nothing until the train was travelling at a good speed, and then he addressed me suddenly.

"You are a good shot with a rifle, are you not?" he enquired.

"I used to be pretty fair," I replied in astonishment. "But I don't think I've had a rifle in my hand since the war."

"Well, take my stick, and hold it as you would a rifle. Now go to the far end of the carriage and lean against the door. That's right. Point your stick at my right eye, as though you were going to shoot at it. Stand like that a minute. Thank you, that will do."

He turned away from me, took a pair of field-glasses from a case he was carrying, and began to survey the country through the window on his side. This he continued to do until the train drew up at Purfleet and we dismounted on to the platform.

"Ah, a lovely day!" he exclaimed. "Not too warm for a little walking. We will make our first call at Purfleet ranges. This was where young Halliday came to do his shooting, you remember."

We made our way to the ranges, and were lucky enough to find the warden at home. Dr. Priestley had, when he chose, a most ingratiating way with him, and he and the warden were very shortly engaged in an animated conversation.

"By the way," enquired the Professor earnestly. "Was there any firing going on here between half-past two and three on Saturday last?"

The range-warden scratched his head with a thoughtful expression on his face. "Let me see, now, last Saturday afternoon. We had a squad of Territorials here on Saturday afternoon, but they didn't arrive till after three. Lord, they was queer hands with a rifle, some of them. Much as they could do to hit the target at all at three hundred. They won't never make marksmen, however hard they try."

"Isn't it rather dangerous to allow such wild shots to fire at all?" suggested the Professor.

"God bless your heart, sir, it's safe enough," replied the range-warden. "There's never been an accident the whole time I've been here. They can't very well miss the butts, and even if they did, there's nobody allowed on the marshes when firing's going on."

"That is comforting, certainly," said the Professor. "Apart from this squad, you had nobody else?"

The range-warden shook his head. "No, sir, they was the only people on the range that day."

"I suppose it is part of your duty to issue ammunition?" enquired the Professor.

"As a rule, sir. But, as it happens, this particular squad always brings their own with them."

The Professor continued his conversation for a little longer, then prepared to depart.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you," he said as he shook hands. "By the way, I believe there are other ranges about here somewhere?"

"That's right, sir," replied the range-warden. "Over yonder, beyond the butts. Rainham ranges, they're called."

"Is there any objection to my walking across the marshes to them?"

"Not a bit, sir. There's no firing to-day. Just keep straight on past the butts, and you'll come to them."

The Professor and I started on our tramp, the Professor pausing every hundred yards or so to look about him through his field-glasses and to verify his position on the map. We reached the Rainham ranges at last, discovered the warden, who fell under the influence of the Professor's charm as readily as his colleague at Purfleet had done, and opened the conversation with him in much the same style.

"On Saturday afternoon last, between half-past two and three?" replied the warden to the Professor's enquiry. "Well, sir, not what you might call any shooting. There was a party from Woolwich, with a new sort of light machine gun, something like a Lewis. But they wasn't shooting, only testing."

"What is the difference?" asked the Professor.

"Well, sir, by testing I mean they had the thing held in a clamp, so that it couldn't move. The idea is to keep it pointing in exactly the same direction, instead of wobbling about as it might if a man was holding it. They use a special target, and measure up the distance between the various bullet holes on it when they've finished."

"I see," replied the Professor. "I wonder if you would mind showing me where they were firing from?"

"Certainly, sir, it's close handy." The range-warden led us to a firing-point near by, and pointed out the spot on which the stand had been erected.

"That's the place, sir. They were firing at Number 10 target over yonder. A thousand yards it is, and wonderful accurate the new gun seemed. Shot the target to pieces, they did."

The Professor made no reply, but took out his map and drew a line upon it from the firing point to the butts. The line, when

extended, led over a tract of desolate marshes until it met the river.

"There is very little danger on these ranges, it appears," remarked the Professor, with a note of annoyance in his voice. "If a shot missed the butts altogether, it could only fall into the river, far away from any frequented spot."

"That's what they were laid out for," replied the range-warden. "You see, on the other side there's a house or two, to say nothing of the road and the railway. It wouldn't do to have any stray rounds falling among them."

"It certainly would not," replied the Professor absently. "I see by the map that Rainham station is not far beyond the end of the ranges. Is there any objection to my walking to it past the butts?"

"None at all, sir, it's the best way to get there when there's no firing on. Thank you, sir, it's been no trouble at all."

We started to walk down the ranges, a puzzled frown on the Professor's face. Every few yards he stopped and examined the country through his glasses, or pulled out the map and stared at it with an absorbed expression. We had reached the butts before he said a word, and then it was not until we had climbed to the top of them that he spoke.

"Very puzzling, very!" he muttered. "There must of course be some explanation. A mathematical deduction from facts can never be false. But I wish I could discover the explanation."

He was looking through his field glasses as he spoke, and suddenly his attention became riveted upon an object in front of him. Without waiting for me he hurried down the steep sides of the butts, and almost ran towards a flagstaff standing a couple of hundred yards on the far side of them. When he arrived at the base of it, he drew a couple of lines on the map, walked half round the flagstaff and gazed intently through his glasses. By the time I had caught up with him he had put the glasses back in their case, and was smiling benevolently.

"We can return to town by the next train, my boy," he said cheerfully. "I have ascertained everything I wished to know."

He refused to say a word until our train was running into Fenchurch Street station. Then suddenly he turned to me.

"I am going to the War Office," he said curtly. "Will you go to Scotland Yard, see Inspector Hanslet, and ask him to come to Westbourne Terrace as soon as he can?"

I found Hanslet, after some little trouble, and gave him the Professor's message.

"Something to do with the Farquharson business, I suppose?" he replied. "Well, I'll come if the Professor wants to see me. But I've got it all fixed up without his help."

He turned up, true to his promise, and the Professor greeted him with a pleasant smile.

"Good evening, Inspector, I'm glad you were able to come. Will you be particularly busy to-morrow morning?"

"I don't think so, Professor," replied Hanslet in a puzzled voice. "Do you want me to do anything?"

"Well, if you can spare the time, I should like to introduce you to the murderer of Mr. Farquharson," said the Professor casually.

Hanslet lay back in his chair and laughed. "Thanks very much, Professor, but I've met him already," he replied. "It would be a waste of your time, I'm afraid."

"Never mind," said the Professor, with a tolerant smile. "I assure you that it will be worth your while to spend the morning with me. Will you meet me by the bookstall at Charing Cross at half-past ten?"

Hanslet reflected for a moment. The Professor had never yet led him on a wild goose chase, and it might be worth while to humour him.

"All right," he replied reluctantly. "I'll come. But I warn you it's no good."

The Professor smiled, but said nothing. Hanslet took his leave of us, and the Professor appeared to put all thought of the Farquharson case out of his head.

We met again at Charing Cross the next day. The Professor had taken tickets to Woolwich, and we got out of the train there and walked to the gates of the Arsenal. The Professor took an official letter out of his pocket, which he gave to the porter. In a few minutes we were led to an office, where a young officer rose to greet us.

"Good morning, Doctor Priestley," he said. "Colonel Conyngham rang me up to say that you were coming. You want to see the stand we use for testing the new automatic rifle? It happens to be in the yard below, being repaired."

"Being repaired?" repeated the Professor quickly. "May I ask what is the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing serious. We used it at Rainham the other day, and

the clamp broke just as we were finishing a series. We had fired ninety-nine rounds out of a hundred, when the muzzle of the gun slipped up. I don't know what happened to the round. I suppose it went into the river somewhere. Beastly nuisance, we shall have to go down and start all over again."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Professor, in a satisfied tone. "That explains it. But I wouldn't use Number 10 target again, if I were you. Can we see this stand?"

"Certainly," replied the officer. "Come along."

He led us into the yard, where a sort of tripod with a clamp at the head of it was standing. The Professor looked at it earnestly for some moments, then turned to Hanslet.

"There you see the murderer of Mr. Farquharson," he said quietly.

Of course Hanslet, the officer and myself bombarded him with questions, which he refused to answer until we had returned to London and were seated in his study. Then, fixing his eyes upon the ceiling and putting the tips of his fingers together, he began.

"It was, to any intelligent man, perfectly obvious that there are half a dozen reasons why young Halliday could not have shot his uncle. In the first place, he must have fired at very close range, from one side or other of the carriage, and a rifle bullet fired at such a range, although it very often makes a very extensive wound of entry, does not stay in a man's brain. It travels right through his head, with very slightly diminished velocity. Next, if Halliday fired at his uncle at all, it must have been from the left hand side of the carriage. Had he fired from the right hand side, the muzzle of the weapon would have been almost touching his victim, and there would have been signs of burning or blackening round the wound. Do you admit this, Inspector?"

"Of course," replied Hanslet. "My theory always has been that he fired from the left hand side."

"Very well," said the Professor quickly. "Now Halliday is notoriously a very bad shot, hence his journey to Purfleet. Harold, on the contrary, is a good shot. Yet, during our expedition of yesterday, I asked him to aim at my right eye with a stick while the train was in motion. I found that never for an instant could he point the stick at it. I find it impossible to believe that a bad shot, firing from the footboard and therefore compelled to use one hand at least to retain his hold, could shoot a man on the far side of the carriage exactly on the temple."

The Professor paused, and Hanslet looked at him doubtfully.

"It all sounds very plausible, Professor, but until you can produce a better explanation I shall continue to believe that my own is the correct one."

"Exactly. It was to verify a theory which I had formed that I carried out my investigations. It was perfectly obvious to me, from your description of the wound, that it had been inflicted by a bullet very near the end of its flight, and therefore possessing only enough velocity to penetrate the skull without passing through it. This meant that it had been fired from a considerable distance away. Upon consulting the map, I discovered that there were two rifle ranges near the railway between London and Tilbury. I could not help feeling that the source of the bullet was probably one of these ranges. It was, at all events, a possibility worth investigating.

"But at the outset I was faced with what seemed an insuperable objection. I deduced from the map, a deduction subsequently verified by examination of the ground, that a round fired at any of the targets on either range would take a direction away from the railway. I also discovered that the only rounds fired while the train in which Mr. Farquharson's body was found was passing the ranges were by an experimental party from the Arsenal. This party employed a special device which eliminated any inaccuracy due to the human element. At this point it occurred to me that my theory was incapable of proof, although I still adhered to my view that it was correct."

The Professor paused and Hanslet ventured to remark.

"I still do not see how you can prove that the breakage of the clamp could have been responsible," he said. "The direction of the bullet remained the same, and only its elevation was affected. By your own showing, the last shot fired from the machine must have landed in the marshes or the river."

"I knew very well that notwithstanding the apparent impossibility, this must have been the bullet which killed Mr. Farquharson," replied the Professor equably. "I climbed the butts behind the target at which the Arsenal party had been firing, and while there I made an interesting discovery which solved the difficulty at once. Directly in line with Number 10 target and some distance behind it was a flagstaff. Further, upon examination of this flagstaff I discovered that it was made of steel.

"Now the map had told me that there was only a short stretch of line upon which a train could be struck by a bullet deflected by this flagstaff. If this had indeed been the case, I knew exactly

where to look for traces, and at my first inspection I found them. High up on the staff is a scar where the paint has recently been removed. To my mind the cause of Mr. Farquharson's death is adequately explained."

Hanslet whistled softly. "By Jove, there's something in it!" he exclaimed. "Your theory, I take it, is that Farquharson was struck by a bullet deflected by the flagstaff?"

"Of course," replied the Professor. "He was sitting on the right hand side of the carriage, facing the engine. He was struck on the right side of the head, which supports the theory of a bullet coming through the open window. A bullet deflected in this way usually turns over and over for the rest of its flight, which accounts for the size of the wound. Have you any objection to offer?"

"Not at the moment," said Hanslet cautiously. "I shall have to verify all these facts, of course. For one thing, I must take the bullet to the Arsenal and see if it is one of the same type as the experimental party were using."

"Verify every thing you can, certainly," replied the Professor. "But remember that facts, not conjecture, are what should guide you."

Hanslet nodded. "I'll remember, Professor," he said. And with that he left us.

Two days later Mary announced Miss Farquharson and Mr. Halliday. They entered the room, and Halliday walked straight up to the Professor and grasped his hand.

"You have rendered me the greatest service one man can render to another, sir!" he exclaimed. "Inspector Hanslet tells me that all suspicion that I murdered my uncle has been cleared away, and that this is due entirely to your efforts."

Before the Professor could reply, Miss Farquharson ran up to him and kissed him impulsively. "Doctor Priestley, you're a darling!" she exclaimed.

The Professor beamed at her through his spectacles. "Really, my dear, you make me feel quite sorry that you are going to marry this young man," he said.

Dorothy L. Sayers

THE CAVE OF ALI BABA

Reprinted from *Lord Peter Views the Body.*

In the front room of a grim and narrow house in Lambeth a man sat eating kippers and glancing through the *Morning Post.* He was smallish and spare, with brown hair rather too regularly waved and a strong, brown beard, cut to a point. His double-breasted suit of navy-blue and his socks, tie, and handkerchief, all scrupulously matched, were a trifle more point-device than the best taste approves, and his boots were slightly too bright a brown. He did not look a gentleman, not even a gentleman's gentleman, yet there was something about his appearance which suggested that he was accustomed to the manner of life in good families. The breakfast-table, which he had set with his own hands, was arrayed with the attention to detail which is exacted of good-class servants. His action, as he walked over to a little side-table and carved himself a plate of ham, was the action of a superior butler; yet he was not old enough to be a retired butler; a footman, perhaps, who had come into a legacy.

He finished the ham with good appetite, and, as he sipped his coffee, read through attentively a paragraph which he had already noticed and put aside for consideration.

"LORD PETER WIMSEY'S WILL
BEQUEST TO VALET
£10,000 TO CHARITIES

"The will of Lord Peter Wimsey, who was killed last December while shooting big game in Tanganyika, was proved yesterday at £500,000. A sum of £10,000 was left to various charities, including [here followed a list of bequests]. To his valet, Mervyn Bunter, was left an annuity of £500 and the lease of the testator's flat in Picadilly. [Then followed a number of personal bequests.] The remainder of the estate, including the valuable collection of books and pictures at 110a Piccadilly, was left to the testator's mother, the Dowager Duchess of Denver.

"Lord Peter Wimsey was thirty-seven at the time of his death. He was the younger brother of the present Duke of Denver, who

is the wealthiest peer in the United Kingdom. Lord Peter was distinguished as a criminologist and took an active part in the solution of several famous mysteries. He was a well-known book collector and man-about-town."

The man gave a sigh of relief.

"No doubt about that," he said aloud. "People don't give their money away if they're going to come back again. The blighter's dead and buried right enough. I'm free."

He finished his coffee, cleared the table, and washed up the crockery, took his bowler hat from the hall-stand, and went out.

A bus took him to Bermondsey. He alighted, and plunged into a network of gloomy streets, arriving after a quarter of an hour's walk at a seedy-looking public-house in a low quarter. He entered and called for a double whisky.

The house had only just opened, but a number of customers, who had apparently been waiting on the doorstep for this desirable event, were already clustered about the bar. The man who might have been a footman reached for his glass, and in doing so jostled the elbow of a flash person in a check suit and regrettable tie.

"Here!" expostulated the flash person, "what d'yer mean by it? We don't want your sort here. Get out!"

He emphasised his remarks with a few highly coloured words, and a violent push in the chest.

"Bar's free to everybody, isn't it?" said the other, returning the shove with interest.

"Now then!" said the barmaid, "none o' that. The gentleman didn't do it intentional, Mr. Jukes."

"Didn't he?" said Mr. Jukes. "Well, I *did*."

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourself," retorted the young lady, with a toss of the head. "I'll have no quarrelling in my bar—not this time in the morning."

"It was quite an accident," said the man from Lambeth. "I'm not one to make a disturbance, having always been used to the best houses. But if any gentleman *wants* to make trouble——"

"All right, all right," said Mr. Jukes, more pacifically. "I'm not keen to give you a new face. Not but what any alteration wouldn't be for the better. Mind your manners another time, that's all. What'll you have?"

"No, no," protested the other, "this one must be on me. Sorry I pushed you. I didn't mean it. But I didn't like to be taken up so short."

"Say no more about it," said Mr. Jukes generously. "I'm standing this. Another double whisky, miss, and one of the usual. Come over here where there isn't so much of a crowd, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble again."

He led the way to a small table in the corner of the room.

"That's all right," said Mr. Jukes. "Very nicely done. I don't think there's any danger here, but you can't be too careful. Now, what about it, Rogers? Have you made up your mind to come in with us?"

"Yes," said Rogers, with a glance over his shoulder, "yes, I have. That is, mind you, if everything seems all right. I'm not looking for trouble, and I don't want to get let in for any dangerous games. I don't mind giving you information, but it's understood as I take no active part in whatever goes on. Is that straight?"

"You wouldn't be allowed to take an active part if you wanted to," said Mr. Jukes. "Why, you poor fish, Number One wouldn't have anybody but experts on his jobs. All you have to do is to let us know where the stuff is and how to get it. The Society does the rest. It's some organisation, I can tell you. You won't even know who's doing it, or how it's done. You won't know anybody, and nobody will know you—except Number One, of course. He knows everybody."

"And you," said Rogers.

"And me, of course. But I shall be transferred to another district. We shan't meet again after to-day, except at the general meetings, and then we shall all be masked."

"Go on!" said Rogers incredulously.

"Fact. You'll be taken to Number One—he'll see you, but you won't see him. Then, if he thinks you're any good, you'll be put on the roll, and after that you'll be told where to make your reports to. There is a divisional meeting called once a fortnight, and every three months there's a general meeting and share-out. Each member is called up by number and has his whack handed over to him. That's all."

"Well, but suppose two members are put on the same job together?"

"If it's a daylight job, they'll be so disguised their mothers wouldn't know 'em. But it's mostly night work."

"I see. But, look here—what's to prevent somebody following me home and giving me away to the police?"

"Nothing, of course. Only I wouldn't advise him to try it, that's all. The last man who had that bright idea was fished out of the river down Rotherhithe way, before he had time to get his precious report in. Number One knows everybody, you see."

"Oh!—and who is this Number One?"

"There's lots of people would give a good bit to know that."

"Does nobody know?"

"Nobody. He's a fair marvel, is Number One. He's a gentleman, I can tell you that, and a pretty high-up one, from his ways. *And* he's got eyes all round his head. *And* he's got an arm as long as from here to Australia. *But* nobody knows anything about him, unless it's Number Two, and I'm not even sure about her."

"There are women in it, then?"

"You can bet your boots there are. You can't do a job without 'em nowadays. But that needn't worry you. The women are safe enough. They don't want to come to a sticky end, no more than you and me."

"But, look here, Jukes—how about the money? It's a big risk to take. Is it worth it?"

. "Worth it?" Jukes leant across the little marble-topped table and whispered.

"Coo!" gasped Rogers. "And how much of that would I get now?"

"You'd share and share alike with the rest, whether you'd been in that particular job or not. There's fifty members, and you'd get one-fiftieth, same as Number One and same as me."

"Really? No kidding?"

"See that wet, see that dry!" Jukes laughed. "Say, can you beat it? There's never been anything like it. It's the biggest thing ever been known. He's a great man, is Number One."

"And do you pull off many jobs?"

"Many? Listen. You remember the Carruthers necklace, and the Gorleston Bank robbery? And the Faversham burglary? And the big Rubens that disappeared from the National Gallery? And the Frensham pearls? All done by the Society. And never one of them cleared up."

Rogers licked his lips.

"But now, look here," he said cautiously. "Supposing I was a

spy, as you might say, and supposing I was to go straight off and tell the police about what you've been saying?"

"Ah!" said Jukes, "suppose you did, eh? Well, supposing something nasty didn't happen to you on the way there—which I wouldn't answer for, mind——"

"Do you mean to say you've got me watched?"

"You can bet your sweet life we have. Yes. Well, *supposing* nothing happened on the way there, and you was to bring the slops to this pub, looking for yours truly——"

"Yes?"

"You wouldn't find me, that's all. I should have gone to Number Five."

"Who's Number Five?"

"Ah! I don't know. But he's the man that makes you a new face while you wait. Plastic surgery, they call it. And new fingerprints. New everything. We go in for up-to-date methods in our show."

Rogers whistled.

"Well, how about it?" asked Jukes, eyeing his acquaintance over the rim of his tumbler.

"Look here—you've told me a lot of things. Shall I be safe if I say 'no'?"

"Oh, yes—if you behave yourself and don't make trouble for us."

"H'm, I see. And if I say 'yes'?"

"Then you'll be a rich man in less than no time, with money in your pocket to live like a gentleman. And nothing to do for it, except to tell us what you know about the houses you've been to when you were in service. It's money for jam if you act straight by the Society."

Rogers was silent, thinking it over.

"I'll do it!" he said at last.

"Good for you. Miss! The same again, please. Here's to it, Rogers! I knew you were one of the right sort the minute I set eyes on you. Here's to money for jam, and take care of Number One! Talking of Number One, you'd better come round and see him to-night. No time like the present."

"Right you are. Where'll I come to? Here?"

"Nix. No more of this little pub for us. It's a pity, because it's nice and comfortable, but it can't be helped. Now, what you've got to do is this. At ten o'clock to-night exactly you walk north

across Lambeth Bridge" (Rogers winced at this intimation that his abode was known), "and you'll see a yellow taxi standing there, with the driver doing something to his engine. You'll say to him, 'Is your bus fit to go?' and he'll say, 'Depends where you want to go to.' And you'll say, 'Take me to Number One, London.' There's a shop called that, by the way, but he won't take you there. You won't know where he *is* taking you, because the taxi-windows will be covered up, but you mustn't mind that. It's the rule for the first visit. Afterwards, when you're regularly one of us, you'll be told the name of the place. And when you get there, do as you're told and speak the truth, because if you don't, Number One will deal with you. See?"

"I see."

"Are you game? You're not afraid?"

"Of course I'm not afraid."

"Good man! Well, we'd better be moving now. And I'll say good-bye, because we shan't see each other again. Good-bye—and good luck!"

"Good-bye."

They passed through the swing-doors, and out into the mean and dirty street.

. . . . . .

The two years subsequent to the enrolment of the ex-footman Rogers in a crook society were marked by a number of startling and successful raids on the houses of distinguished people. There was the theft of the great diamond tiara from the Dowager Duchess of Denver; the burglary at the flat formerly occupied by the late Lord Peter Wimsey, resulting in the disappearance of £7,000 worth of silver and gold plate; the burglary at the country mansion of Theodore Winthrop, the millionaire—which incidentally, exposed that thriving gentleman as a confirmed Society blackmailer and caused a reverberating scandal in Mayfair; and the snatching of the famous eight-string necklace of pearls from the neck of the Marchioness of Dinglewood during the singing of the Jewel Song in *Faust* at Covent Garden. It is true that the pearls turned out to be imitation, the original string having been pawned by the noble lady under circumstances highly painful to the Marquis, but the coup was nevertheless a sensational one.

On a Saturday afternoon in January, Rogers was sitting in his room in Lambeth, when a slight noise at the front door caught his ear. He sprang up almost before it had ceased, dashed through

the small hallway, and flung the door open. The street was deserted. Nevertheless, as he turned back to the sitting-room, he saw an envelope lying on the hat-stand. It was addressed briefly to "Number Twenty-one." Accustomed by this time to the somewhat dramatic methods used by the Society to deliver its correspondence, he merely shrugged his shoulders, and opened the note.

It was written in cipher, and, when transcribed, ran thus:

> "Number Twenty-one,—An Extraordinary General Meeting will be held to-night at the house of Number One at 11.30. You will be absent at your peril. The word is FINALITY."

Rogers stood for a little time considering this. Then he made his way to a room at the back of the house, in which there was a tall safe, built into the wall. He manipulated the combination and walked into the safe, which ran back for some distance, forming, indeed, a small strong-room. He pulled out a drawer marked "Correspondence," and added the paper he had just received to the contents.

After a few moments he emerged, re-set the lock to a new combination, and returned to the sitting-room.

"Finality," he said. "Yes—I think so." He stretched out his hand to the telephone—then appeared to alter his mind.

He went upstairs to an attic, and thence climbed into a loft close under the roof. Crawling among the rafters, he made his way into the farthest corner; then carefully pressed a knot on the timber-work. A concealed trap-door swung open. He crept through it, and found himself in the corresponding loft of the next house. A soft cooing noise greeted him as he entered. Under the skylight stood three cages, each containing a carrier pigeon.

He glanced cautiously out of the skylight, which looked out upon a high blank wall at the back of some factory or other. There was nobody in the dim little courtyard, and no window within sight. He drew his head in again, and, taking a small fragment of thin paper from his pocket-book, wrote a few letters and numbers upon it. Going to the nearest cage, he took out the pigeon and attached the message to its wing. Then he carefully set the bird on the window-ledge. It hesitated a moment, shifted its pink feet a few times, lifted its wings, and was gone. He saw it tower up into the already darkening sky over the factory roof and vanish into the distance.

He glanced at his watch and returned downstairs. An hour

latter he released the second pigeon, and in another hour the third. Then he sat down to wait.

At half-past nine he went up to the attic again. It was dark, but a few frosty stars were shining, and a cold air blew through the open window. Something pale gleamed faintly on the floor. He picked it up—it was warm and feathery. The answer had come.

He ruffled the soft plumes and found the paper. Before reading it, he fed the pigeon and put it into one of the cages. As he was about to fasten the door, he checked himself.

"If anything happens to me," he said, "there's no need for you to starve to death, my child."

He pushed the window a little wider open and went downstairs again. The paper in his hand bore only the two letters, "O.K." It seemed to have been written hurriedly, for there was a long smear of ink in the upper left-hand corner. He noted this with a smile, put the paper in the fire, and, going out into the kitchen, prepared and ate a hearty meal of eggs and corned beef from a new tin. He ate it without bread, though there was a loaf on the shelf near at hand, and washed it down with water from the tap, which he let run for some time before venturing to drink it. Even then he carefully wiped the tap, both inside and outside, before drinking.

When he had finished, he took a revolver from a locked drawer, inspecting the mechanism with attention to see that it was in working order, and loaded it with new cartridges from an unbroken packet. Then he sat down to wait again.

At a quarter before eleven, he rose and went out into the street. He walked briskly, keeping well away from the wall, till he came out into a well-lighted thoroughfare. Here he took a bus, securing the corner seat next the conductor, from which he could see everybody who got on and off. A succession of buses eventually brought him to a respectable residential quarter of Hampstead. Here he alighted and, still keeping well away from the walls, made his way up to the Heath.

The night was moonless, but not altogether black, and, as he crossed a deserted part of the Heath, he observed one or two other dark forms closing in upon him from various directions. He paused in the shelter of a large tree, and adjusted to his face a black velvet mask, which covered him from brow to chin. At its base the number 21 was clearly embroidered in white thread.

At length a slight dip in the ground disclosed one of those

agreeable villas which stand, somewhat isolated, among the rural surroundings of the Heath. One of the windows was lighted. As he made his way to the door, other dark figures, masked like himself, pressed forward and surrounded him. He counted six of them.

The foremost man knocked on the door of the solitary house. After a moment it was opened slightly. The man advanced his head to the opening; there was a murmur, and the door opened wide. The man stepped in, and the door was shut.

When three of the men had entered, Rogers found himself to be the next in turn. He knocked, three times loudly, then twice faintly. The door opened to the extent of two or three inches, and an ear was presented to the chink. Rogers whispered "Finality." The ear was withdrawn, the door opened, and he passed in.

Without any further word of greeting, Number Twenty-one passed into a small room on the left, which was furnished like an office, with a desk, safe, and a couple of chairs. At the desk sat a massive man in evening dress, with a ledger before him. The new arrival shut the door carefully after him; it clicked to, on a spring lock. Advancing to the desk, he announced, "Number Twenty-one, sir," and stood respectfully waiting. The big man looked up, showing the number 1 startlingly white on his velvet mask. His eyes, of a curious hard blue, scanned Rogers attentively. At a sign from him, Rogers removed his mask. Having verified his identity with care, the President said, "Very well, Number Twenty-one," and made an entry in the ledger. The voice was hard and metallic, like his eyes. The close scrutiny from behind the immovable black mask seemed to make Rogers uneasy; he shifted his feet, and his eyes fell. Number One made a sign of dismissal, and Rogers, with a faint sigh as though of relief, replaced his mask and left the room. As he came out, the next comer passed in in his place.

The room in which the Society met was a large one, made by knocking the two largest of the first-floor rooms into one. It was furnished in the standardised taste of twentieth-century suburbia and brilliantly lighted. A gramophone in one corner blared out a jazz tune, to which about ten couples of masked men and women were dancing, some in evening dress and others in tweeds and jumpers.

In one corner of the room was an American bar. Rogers went up and asked the masked man in charge for a double whisky. He

consumed it slowly, leaning on the bar. The room filled. Presently somebody moved across to the gramophone and stopped it. He looked round. Number One had appeared on the threshold. A tall woman in black stood beside him. The mask, embroidered with a white 2, covered hair and face completely; only her fine bearing and her white arms and bosom and the dark eyes shinning through the eye-slits proclaimed her a woman of power and physical attraction.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Number One was standing at the upper end of the room. The woman sat beside him; her eyes were cast down and betrayed nothing, but her hands were clenched on the arms of the chair and her whole figure seemed tensely aware.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Our numbers are two short to-night." The masks moved; eyes were turned, seeking and counting. "I need not inform you of the disastrous failure of our plan for securing the plans of the Court-Windlesham helicopter. Our courageous and devoted comrades, Number Fifteen and Number Forty-eight, were betrayed and taken by the police."

An uneasy murmur arose among the company.

"It may have occurred to some of you that even the well-known steadfastness of these comrades might give way under examination. There is no cause for alarm. The usual orders have been issued, and I have this evening received the report that their tongues have been effectually silenced. You will, I am sure, be glad to know that these two brave men have been spared the ordeal of so great a temptation to dishonour, and that they will not be called upon to face a public trial and the rigours of a long imprisonment."

A hiss of intaken breath moved across the assembled members like the wind over a barley-field.

"Their dependants will be discreetly compensated in the usual manner. I call upon Numbers Twelve and Thirty-four to undertake this agreeable task. They will attend me in my office for their instructions after the meeting. Will the Numbers I have named kindly signify that they are able and willing to perform this duty?"

Two hands were raised in salute. The President continued, looking at his watch:

"Ladies and gentleman, please take your partners for the next dance."

The gramophone struck up again. Rogers turned to a girl near him in a red dress. She nodded, and they slipped into the move-

ment of a fox-trot. The couples gyrated solemnly and in silence. Their shadows were flung against the blinds as they turned and stepped to and fro.

"What has happened?" breathed the girl in a whisper, scarcely moving her lips. "I'm frightened, aren't you? I feel as if something awful was going to happen."

"It does take one a bit short, the President's way of doing things," agreed Rogers, "but it's safer like that."

"Those poor men——"

A dancer, turning and following on their heels, touched Rogers on the shoulder.

"No talking, please," he said. His eyes gleamed sternly; he twirled his partner into the middle of the crowd and was gone. The girl shuddered.

The gramophone stopped. There was a burst of clapping. The dancers again clustered before the President's seat.

"Ladies and gentlemen. You may wonder why this extraordinary meeting has been called. The reason is a serious one. The failure of our recent attempt was no accident. The police were not on the premises that night by chance. We have a traitor among us."

Partners who had been standing close together fell distrustfully apart. Each member seemed to shrink, as a snail shrinks from the touch of a finger.

"You will remember the disappointing outcome of the Dinglewood affair," went on the President, in his harsh voice. "You may recall other smaller matters which have not turned out satisfactorily. All these troubles have been traced to their origin. I am happy to say that our minds can now be easy. The offender has been discovered and will be removed. There will be no more mistakes. The misguided member who introduced the traitor to our Society will be placed in a position where his lack of caution will have no further ill-effects. There is no cause for alarm."

Every eye roved about the company, searching for the traitor and his unfortunate sponsor. Somewhere beneath the black masks a face must have turned white; somewhere under the stifling velvet there must have been a brow sweating, not with the heat of the dance. But the masks hid everything.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your partners for the next dance."

The gramophone struck into an old and half-forgotten tune: "There ain't nobody loves me." The girl in red was claimed by a

tall mask in evening dress. A hand laid on Rogers's arm made him start. A small, plump woman in a green jumper slipped a cold hand into his. The dance went on.

When it stopped, amid the usual applause, everyone stood, detached, stiffened in expectation. The President's voice was raised again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please behave naturally. This is a dance, not a public meeting."

Rogers led his partner to a chair and fetched her an ice. As he stooped over her, he noticed the hurried rise and fall of her bosom.

"Ladies and gentlemen." The endless interval was over. "You will no doubt wish to be immediately relieved from suspense. I will name the persons involved. Number Thirty-seven!"

A man sprang up with a fearful, strangled cry.

"Silence!"

The wretch choked and gasped.

"I never—I swear I never—I'm innocent."

"Silence. You have failed in discretion. You will be dealt with. If you have anything to say in defence of your folly, I will hear it later. Sit down."

Number Thirty-seven sank down upon a chair. He pushed his handkerchief under the mask to wipe his face. Two tall men closed in upon him. The rest fell back, feeling the recoil of humanity from one stricken by mortal disease.

The gramophone struck up.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I will now name the traitor. Number Twenty-one, stand forward."

Rogers stepped forward. The concentrated fear and loathing of forty-eight pairs of eyes burned upon him. The miserable Jukes set up a fresh wail.

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

"Silence! Number Twenty-one, take off your mask."

The traitor pulled the thick covering from his face. The intense hatred of the eyes devoured him.

"Number Thirty-seven, this man was introduced here by you, under the name of Joseph Rogers, formerly second footman in the service of the Duke of Denver, dismissed for pilfering. Did you take steps to verify that statement?"

"I did—I did! As God's my witness, it was all straight. I had him identified by two of the servants. I made enquiries. The tale was straight—I'll swear it was."

The President consulted a paper before him, then he looked at his watch again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take your partners. . . ."

Number Twenty-one, his arms twisted behind him and bound, and his wrists handcuffed, stood motionless, while the dance of doom circled about him. The clapping, as it ended, sounded like the clapping of the men and women who sat, thirsty-lipped, beneath the guillotine.

"Number Twenty-one, your name has been given as Joseph Rogers, footman, dismissed for theft. Is that your real name?"

"No."

"What is your name?"

"Peter Death Bredon Wimsey."

"We thought you were dead."

"Naturally. You were intended to think so."

"What has become of the genuine Joseph Rogers?"

"He died abroad. I took his place. I may say that no real blame attaches to your people for not having realised who I was. I not only took Rogers's place; I *was* Rogers. Even when I was alone, I walked like Rogers, I sat like Rogers, I read Rogers's books and wore Rogers's clothes. In the end, I almost thought Rogers's thoughts. The only way to keep up a successful impersonation is never to relax."

"I see. The robbery of your own flat was arranged?"

"Obviously."

"The robbery of the Dowager Duchess, your mother, was connived at by you?"

"It was. It was a very ugly tiara—no real loss to anybody with decent taste. May I smoke, by the way?"

"You may not. Ladies and gentlemen. . . ."

The dance was like the mechanical jigging of puppets. Limbs jerked, feet faltered. The prisoner watched with an air of critical detachment.

"Numbers Fifteen, Twenty-two, and Forty-nine. You have watched the prisoner. Has he made any attempts to communicate with anybody?"

"None." Number Twenty-two was the spokesman. "His letters and parcels have been opened, his telephone tapped, and his movements followed. His water-pipes have been under observation for Morse signals."

"You are sure of what you say?"

"Absolutely."

"Prisoner, have you been alone in this adventure? Speak the truth, or things will be made somewhat more unpleasant for you than they might otherwise be."

"I have been alone. I have taken no unnecessary risks."

"It may be so. It will, however, be as well that steps should be taken to silence the man at Scotland Yard—what is his name? —Parker. Also the prisoner's manservant, Mervyn Bunter, and possibly also his mother and sister. The brother is a stupid oaf, and not, I think, likely to have been taken into the prisoner's confidence. A precautionary watch will, I think, meet the necessities of his case."

The prisoner appeared, for the first time, to be moved.

"Sir, I assure you that my mother and sister know nothing which could possibly bring danger on the Society."

"You should have thought of their situation earlier. Ladies and gentlemen, please take——"

"No—no!" Flesh and blood could endure the mockery no longer. "No! Finish with him. Get it over. Break up the meeting. It's dangerous. The police——"

"Silence!"

The President glanced round at the crowd. It had a dangerous look about it. He gave way.

"Very well. Take the prisoner away and silence him. He will receive Number 4 treatment. And be sure you explain it to him carefully first."

"Ah!"

The eyes expressed a wolfish satisfaction. Strong hands gripped Wimsey's arms.

"One moment—for God's sake let me die decently."

"You should have thought this over earlier. Take him away. Ladies and gentlemen, be satisfied—he will not die quickly."

"Stop! Wait!" cried Wimsey desperately. "I have something to say. I don't ask for life—only for a quick death. I—I have something to sell."

"To sell?"

"Yes."

"We make no bargains with traitors."

"No—but listen! Do you think I have not thought of this? I am not so mad. I have left a letter."

"Ah! now it is coming. A letter. To whom?"

"To the police. If I do not return to-morrow——"

"Well?"

"The letter will be opened."

"Sir," broke in Number Fifteen. "This is bluff. The prisoner has not sent any letter. He has been strictly watched for many months."

"Ah! but listen. I left the letter before I came to Lambeth."

"Then it can contain no information of value."

"Oh, but it does."

"What?"

"The combination of my safe."

"Indeed? Has this man's safe been searched?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did it contain?"

"No information of importance, sir. An outline of our organisation—the name of this house—nothing that cannot be altered and covered before morning."

Wimsey smiled.

"Did you investigate the inner compartment of the safe?"

There was a pause.

"You hear what he says," snapped the President sharply. "Did you find this inner compartment?"

"There was no inner compartment, sir. He is trying to bluff."

"I hate to contradict you," said Wimsey, with an effort at his ordinary pleasant tone, "but I really think you must have overlooked the inner compartment."

"Well," said the President, "and what do you say is in this inner compartment, if it does exist?"

"The names of every member of this Society, with their addresses, photographs, and finger-prints."

"What?"

The eyes round him now were ugly with fear. Wimsey kept his face steadily turned towards the President.

"How do you say you have contrived to get this information?"

"Well, I have been doing a little detective work on my own, you know."

"But you have been watched."

"True. The finger-prints of my watchers adorn the first page of the collection."

"This statement can be proved?"

"Certainly. I will prove it. The name of Number Fifty, for example——"

"Stop!"

A fierce muttering arose. The President silenced it with a gesture.

"If you mention names here, you will certainly have no hope of mercy. There is a fifth treatment—kept specially for people who mention names. Bring the prisoner to my office. Keep the dance going."

The President took an automatic from his hip-pocket and faced his tightly fettered prisoner across the desk.

"Now speak!" he said.

"I should put that thing away, if I were you," said Wimsey contemptuously. "It would be a much pleasanter form of death than treatment Number 5, and I might be tempted to ask for it."

"Ingenious," said the President, "but a little too ingenious. Now, be quick; tell me what you know."

"Will you spare me if I tell you?"

"I make no promises. Be quick."

Wimsey shrugged his bound and aching shoulders.

"Certainly. I will tell you what I know. Stop me when you have heard enough."

He leaned forward and spoke low. Overhead the noise of the gramophone and the shuffling of feet bore witness that the dance was going on. Stray passers-by crossing the Heath noted that the people in the lonely house were making a night of it again.

. . . . . .

"Well," said Wimsey, "am I to go on?"

From beneath the mask the President's voice sounded as though he were grimly smiling.

"My lord," he said, "your story fills me with regret that you are not, in fact, a member of our Society. Wit, courage, and industry are valuable to an association like ours. I fear I cannot persuade you? No—I supposed not."

He touched a bell on his desk.

"Ask the members kindly to proceed to the supper-room," he said to the mask who entered.

The "supper-room" was on the ground-floor, shuttered and curtained. Down its centre ran a long, bare table, with chairs set about it.

"A Barmecide feast, I see," said Wimsey pleasantly. It was the first time he had seen this room. At the far end, a trap-door in the floor gaped ominously.

The President took the head of the table.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, as usual—and the foolish courtesy had never sounded so sinister—"I will not conceal from you the seriousness of the situation. The prisoner has recited to me more than twenty names and addresses which were thought to be unknown, except to their owners and to me. There has been great carelessness"—his voice rang harshly—"which will have to be looked into. Finger-prints have been obtained—he has shown me the photographs of some of them. How our investigators came to overlook the inner door of this safe is a matter which calls for enquiry."

"Don't blame them," put in Wimsey. "It was meant to be overlooked, you know. I made it like that on purpose."

The President went on, without seeming to notice the interruption.

"The prisoner informs me that the book with the names and addresses is to be found in this inner compartment, together with certain letters and papers stolen from the houses of members, and numerous objects bearing authentic finger-prints. I believe him to be telling the truth. He offers the combination of the safe in exchange for a quick death. I think the offer should be accepted. What is your opinion, ladies and gentlemen?"

"The combination is known already," said Number Twenty-two.

"Imbecile! This man has told us, and has proved to me, that he is Lord Peter Wimsey. Do you think he will have forgotten to alter the combination? And then there is the secret of the inner door. If he disappears to-night and the police enter his house——"

"I say," said a woman's rich voice, "that the promise should be given and the information used—and quickly. Time is getting short."

A murmur of agreement went round the table.

"You hear," said the President, addressing Wimsey. "The Society offers you the privilege of a quick death in return for the combination of the safe and the secret of the inner door."

"I have your word for it?"

"You have."

"Thank you. And my mother and sister?"

"If you in your turn will give us your word—you are a man of honour—that these women know nothing that could harm us, they shall be spared."

"Thank you, sir. You may rest assured, upon my honour, that

they know nothing. I should not think of burdening any woman with such dangerous secrets—particularly those who are dear to me."

"Very well. It is agreed—yes?"

The murmur of assent was given, though with less readiness than before.

"Then I am willing to give you the information you want. The word of the combination is UNRELIABILITY."

"And the inner door?"

"In anticipation of the visit of the police, the inner door—which might have presented difficulties—is open."

"Good! You understand that if the police interfere with our messenger—"

"That would not help me, would it?"

"It is a risk," said the President thoughtfully, "but a risk which I think we must take. Carry the prisoner down to the cellar. He can amuse himself by contemplating apparatus Number 5. In the meantime, Numbers Twelve and Forty-six——"

"No, no!"

A sullen mutter of dissent arose and swelled threateningly.

"No," said a tall man with a voice like treacle. "No—why should any members be put in possession of this evidence? We have found one traitor among us to-night and more than one fool. How are we to know that Numbers Twelve and Forty-six are not fools and traitors also?"

The two men turned savagely upon the speaker, but a girl's voice struck into the discussion, high and agitated.

"Hear, hear! That's right, I say. How about us? We ain't going to have our names read by somebody we don't know nothing about. I've had enough of this. They might sell the 'ole lot of us to the narks."

"I agree," said another member. "Nobody ought to be trusted, nobody at all."

The President shrugged his shoulders.

"Then what, ladies and gentlemen, do you suggest?"

There was a pause. Then the same girl shrilled out again:

"I say Mr. President oughter go himself. He's the only one as knows all the names. It won't be no cop to him. Why should we take all the risk and trouble and him sit at home and collar the money? Let him go himself, that's what I say."

A long rustle of approbation went round the table.

"I second that motion," said a stout man who wore a bunch

of gold seals at his fob. Wimsey smiled as he looked at the seals; it was that trifling vanity which had led him directly to the name and address of the stout man, and he felt a certain affection for the trinkets on that account.

The President looked round.

"It is the wish of the meeting, then, that I should go?" he said, in an ominous voice.

Forty-five hands were raised in approbation. Only the woman known as Number Two remained motionless and silent, her strong white hands clenched on the arm of the chair.

The President rolled his eyes slowly round the threatening ring till they rested upon her.

"Am I to take it that this vote is unanimous?" he enquired.

The woman raised her head.

"Don't go," she gasped faintly.

"You hear," said the President, in a faintly derisive tone, "This lady says, don't go."

"I submit that what Number Two says is neither here nor there," said the man with the treacly voice. "Our own ladies might not like us to be going, if they were in madame's privileged position." His voice was an insult.

"Hear, hear!" cried another man. "This is a democratic society, this is. We don't want no privileged classes."

"Very well," said the President. "You hear, Number Two. The feeling of the meeting is against you. Have you any reasons to put forward in favour of your opinion?"

"A hundred. The President is the head and soul of our Society. If anything should happen to him—where should we be? You" —she swept the company magnificently with her eyes—"you have all blundered. We have your carelessness to thank for all this. Do you think we should be safe for five minutes if the President were not here to repair your follies?"

"Something in that," said a man who had not hitherto spoken.

"Pardon my suggesting," said Wimsey maliciously, "that, as the lady appears to be in a position peculiarly favourable for the reception of the President's confidences, the contents of my modest volume will probably be no news to her. Why should not Number Two go herself?"

"Because I say she must not," said the President sternly, checking the quick reply that rose to his companion's lips. "If it is the will of the meeting, I will go. Give me the key of the house."

One of the men extracted it from Wimsey's jacket-pocket and handed it over.

"Is the house watched?" he demanded of Wimsey.

"No."

"That is the truth?"

"It is the truth."

The President turned at the door.

"If I have not returned in two hours' time," he said, "act for the best to save yourselves, and do what you like with the prisoner. Number Two will give orders in my absence."

He left the room. Number Two rose from her seat with a gesture of command.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Supper is now considered over. Start the dancing again."

. . . . . .

Down in the cellar the time passed slowly, in the contemplation of apparatus Number 5. The miserable Jukes, alternately wailing and raving, at length shrieked himself into exhaustion. The four members guarding the prisoners whispered together from time to time.

"An hour and a half since the President left," said one.

Wimsey glanced up. Then he returned to his examination of the room. There were many curious things in it, which he wanted to memorise.

Presently the trap-door was flung open. "Bring him up!" cried a voice. Wimsey rose immediately, and his face was rather pale.

The members of the gang were again seated round the table. Number Two occupied the President's chair, and her eyes fastened on Wimsey's face with a tigerish fury, but when she spoke it was with a self-control which roused his admiration.

"The President has been two hours gone," she said. "What has happened to him? Traitor twice over—what has happened to him?"

"How should I know?" said Wimsey. "Perhaps he has looked after Number One and gone while the going was good!"

She sprang up with a little cry of rage, and came close to him.

"Beast! liar!" she said, and struck him on the mouth. "You know he would never do that. He is faithful to his friends. What have you done with him? Speak—or I will make you speak. You two, there—bring the irons. He *shall* speak!"

"I can only form a guess, madame," replied Wimsey, "and

I shall not guess any the better for being stimulated with hot irons, like Pantaloon at the circus. Calm yourself, and I will tell you what I think. I think—indeed, I greatly fear—that Monsieur le Président in his hurry to examine the interesting exhibits in my safe may, quite inadvertently, no doubt, have let the door of the inner compartment close behind him. In which case——"

He raised his eyebrows, his shoulders being too sore for shrugging, and gazed at her with a limpid and innocent regret.

"What do you mean?"

Wimsey glanced round the circle.

"I think," he said, "I had better begin from the beginning by explaining to you the mechanism of my safe. It is rather a nice safe," he added plaintively. "I invented the idea myself—not the principle of its working, of course; that is a matter for scientists—but just the idea of the thing.

"The combination I gave you is perfectly correct as far as it goes. It is a three-alphabet thirteen-letter lock by Bunn & Fishett—a very good one of its kind. It opens the outer door, leading into the ordinary strong-room, where I keep my cash and my Froth-Blower's cuff-links and all that. But there is an inner compartment with two doors, which open in a quite different manner. The outermost of these two inner doors is merely a thin steel skin, painted to look like the back of the safe and fitting closely, so as not to betray any joint. It lies in the same plane as the wall of the room, you understand, so that if you were to measure the outside and the inside of the safe you would discover no discrepancy. It opens outwards with an ordinary key, and, as I truly assured the President, it was left open when I quitted my flat."

"Do you think," said the woman sneeringly, "that the President is so simple as to be caught in a so obvious trap? He will have wedged open that inner door undoubtedly."

"Undoubtedly, madame. But the sole purpose of that outer inner door, if I may so express myself, is to appear to be the only inner door. But hidden behind the hinge of that door is another door, a sliding panel, set so closely in the thickness of the wall that you would hardly see it unless you knew it was there. This door was also left open. Our revered Number One had nothing to do but to walk straight through into the inner compartment of the safe, which, by the way, is built into the chimney of the old basement kitchen, which runs up the house at that point. I hope I make myself clear?"

"Yes, yes—get on. Make your story short."

Wimsey bowed, and, speaking with even greater deliberation than ever, resumed:

"Now, this interesting list of the Society's activities, which I have had the honour of compiling, is written in a very large book—bigger, even, than Monsieur le Président's ledger which he uses downstairs. (I trust, by the way, madame, that you have borne in mind the necessity of putting that ledger in a safe place. Apart from risk of investigation by some officious policeman, it would be inadvisable that any junior member of the Society should get hold of it. The feeling of the meeting would, I fancy, be opposed to such an occurrence.)"

"It is secure," she answered hastily. "*Mon dieu!* get on with your story."

"Thank you—you have relieved my mind. Very good. This big book lies on a steel shelf at the back of the inner compartment. Just a moment I have not described this inner compartment to you. It is six feet high, three feet wide, and three feet deep. One can stand up in it quite comfortably, unless one is very tall. It suits me nicely—as you may see, I am not more than five feet eight and a half. The President has the advantage of me in height; he might be a little cramped, but there would be room for him to squat if he grew tired of standing. By the way, I don't know if you know it, but you have tied me up rather tightly."

"I would have you tied till your bones were locked together. Beat him, you! He is trying to gain time."

"If you beat me," said Wimsey, "I'm damned if I'll speak at all. Control yourself, madame; it does not do to move hastily when your king is in check."

"Get on!" she cried again, stamping with rage.

"Where was I? Ah! the inner compartment. As I say, it is a little snug—the more so that it is not ventilated in any way. Did I mention that the book lay on a steel shelf?"

"You did."

"Yes. The steel shelf is balanced on a very delicate concealed spring. When the weight of the book—a heavy one, as I said—is lifted, the shelf rises almost imperceptibly. In rising it makes an electrical contact. Imagine to yourself, madame; our revered President steps in—propping the false door open behind him—he sees the book—quickly he snatches it up. To make sure that it is the right one, he opens it—he studies the pages. He looks about for the other objects I have mentioned, which bear the

marks of finger-prints. And silently, but very, very quickly—you can imagine it, can you not?—the secret panel, released by the rising of the shelf, leaps across like a panther behind him. Rather a trite simile, but apt, don't you think?"

"My God! oh, my God!" Her hand went up as though to tear the choking mask from her face. "You—you devil—devil! What is the word that opens the inner door? Quick! I will have it torn out of you—the word!"

"It is not a hard word to remember, madame—though it has been forgotten before now. Do you recollect, when you were a child, being told the tale of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'? When I had that door made, my mind reverted, with rather a pretty touch of sentimentality, in my opinion, to the happy hours of my childhood. The words that open the door are—'Open Sesame.'"

"Ah! How long can a man live in this devil's trap of yours?"

"Oh," said Wimsey cheerfully, "I should think he might hold out a few hours if he kept cool and didn't use up the available oxygen by shouting and hammering. If we went there at once, I dare say we should find him fairly all right."

"I shall go myself. Take this man and—do your worst with him. Don't finish him till I come back. I want to see him die!"

"One moment," said Wimsey, unmoved by this amiable wish. "I think you had better take me with you."

"Why—why?"

"Because, you see, I'm the only person who can open the door."

"But you have given me the word. Was that a lie?"

"No—the word's all right. But, you see, it's one of these new-style electric doors. In fact, it's really the very latest thing in doors. I'm rather proud of it. It opens to the words 'Open Sesame' all right—*but to my voice only.*"

"Your voice? I will choke your voice with my own hands. What do you mean—your voice only?"

"Just what I say. Don't clutch my throat like that, or you may alter my voice so that the door won't recognize it. That's better. It's apt to be rather pernickety about voices. It got stuck up for a week once, when I had a cold and could only implore it in a hoarse whisper. Even in the ordinary way, I sometimes have to try several times before I hit on the exact right intonation."

She turned and appealed to a short, thick-set man standing beside her.

"Is this true? Is it possible?"

"Perfectly, ma'am, I'm afraid," said the man civilly. From his voice Wimsey took him to be a superior workman of some kind—probably an engineer.

"Is it an electrical device? Do you understand it?"

"Yes, ma'am. It will have a microphone arrangement somewhere, which converts the sound into a series of vibrations controlling an electric needle. When the needle has traced the correct pattern, the circuit is completed and the door opens. The same thing can be done by light vibrations equally easily."

"Couldn't you open it with tools?"

"In time, yes, ma'am. But only by smashing the mechanism, which is probably well protected."

"You may take that for granted," interjected Wimsey reassuringly.

She put her hands to her head.

"I'm afraid we're done in," said the engineer, with a kind of respect in his tone for a good job of work.

"No—wait! Somebody must know—the workmen who made this thing?"

"In Germany," said Wimsey briefly.

"Or—yes, yes, I have it—a gramophone. This—this—*he*—shall be made to say the word for us. Quick—how can it be done?"

"Not possible, ma'am. Where should we get the apparatus at half-past three on a Sunday morning? The poor gentleman would be dead long before——"

There was a silence, during which the sounds of the awakening day came through the shuttered windows. A motor-horn sounded distantly.

"I give in," she said. "We must let him go. Take the ropes off him. You will free him, won't you?" she went on, turning piteously to Wimsey. "Devil as you are, you are not such a devil as that! You will go straight back and save him!"

"Let him go, nothing!" broke in one of the men. "He doesn't go to peach to the police, my lady, don't you think it. The President's done in, that's all, and we'd all better make tracks while we can. It's all up, boys. Chuck this fellow down the cellar and fasten him in, so he can't make a row and wake the place up. I'm going to destroy the ledgers. You can see it done if you don't trust me. And you, Thirty, you know where the switch is. Give us a quarter of an hour to clear, and then you can blow the place to glory."

"No! You can't go—you can't leave him to die—your President—your leader—my—I won't let it happen. Set this devil free. Help me, one of you, with the ropes——"

"None of that, now," said the man who had spoken before. He caught her by the wrists, and she twisted, shrieking, in his arms, biting and struggling to get free.

"Think, think," said the man with the treacly voice. "It's getting on to morning. It'll be light in an hour or two. The police may be here any minute."

"The police!" She seemed to control herself by a violent effort. "Yes, yes, you are right. We must not imperil the safety of all for the sake of one man. *He* himself would not wish it. That is so. We will put this carrion in the cellar where it cannot harm us, and depart, every one to his own place, while there is time."

"And the other prisoner?"

"He? Poor fool—he can do no harm. He knows nothing. Let him go," she answered contemptuously.

In a few minutes' time Wimsey found himself bundled unceremoniously into the depths of the cellar. He was a little puzzled. That they should refuse to let him go, even at the price of Number One's life, he could understand. He had taken the risk with his eyes open. But that they should leave him as a witness against them seemed incredible.

The men who had taken him down strapped his ankles together and departed, switching the lights out as they went.

"Hi! Kamerad!" said Wimsey. "It's a bit lonely sitting here. You might leave the light on."

"It's all right, my friend," was the reply. "You will not be in the dark long. They have set the time-fuse."

The other man laughed with rich enjoyment, and they went out together. So that was it. He was to be blown up with the house. In that case the President would certainly be dead before he was extricated. This worried Wimsey; he would rather have been able to bring the big crook to justice. After all, Scotland Yard had been waiting six years to break up this gang.

He waited, straining his ears. It seemed to him that he heard footsteps over his head. The gang had all crept out by this time. . . .

There was certainly a creak. The trap-door had opened; he felt, rather than heard, somebody creeping into the cellar.

"Hush!" said a voice in his ear. Soft hands passed over his

face, and went fumbling about his body. There came the cold touch of steel on his wrists. The ropes slackened and dropped off. A key clicked in the handcuffs. The strap about his ankles was unbuckled.

"Quick! quick! they have set the time-switch. The house is mined. Follow me as fast as you can. I stole back—I said I had left my jewellery. It was true. I left it on purpose. *He* must be saved—only you can do it. Make haste!"

Wimsey, staggering with pain, as the blood rushed back into his bound and numbed arms, crawled after her into the room above. A moment, and she had flung back the shutters and thrown the window open.

"Now go! Release him! You promise?"

"I promise. And I warn you, madame, that this house is surrounded. When my safe-door closed it gave a signal which sent my servant to Scotland Yard. Your friends are all taken——"

"Ah! But you go—never mind me—quick! The time is almost up."

"Come away from this!"

He caught her by the arm, and they went running and stumbling across the little garden. An electric torch shone suddenly in the bushes.

"That you, Parker?" cried Wimsey. "Get your fellows away. Quick! the house is going up in a minute."

The garden seemed suddenly full of shouting, hurrying men. Wimsey, floundering in the darkness, was brought up violently against the wall. He made a leap at the coping, caught it, and hoisted himself up. His hands groped for the woman; he swung her up beside him. They jumped; everyone was jumping; the woman caught her foot and fell with a gasping cry. Wimsey tried to stop himself, tripped over a stone, and came down headlong. Then, with a flash and a roar, the night went up in fire.

. . . . . .

Wimsey picked himself painfully out from among the débris of the garden wall. A faint moaning near him proclaimed that his companion was still alive. A lantern was turned suddenly upon them.

"Here you are!" said a cheerful voice. "Are you all right, old thing? Good lord! what a hairy monster!"

"All right," said Wimsey. "Only a bit winded. Is the lady

safe? H'm—arm broken apparently—otherwise sound. What's happened?"

"About half a dozen of 'em got blown up; the rest we've bagged." Wimsey became aware of a circle of dark forms in the wintry dawn. "Good Lord, what a day! What a come-back for a public character! You old stinker—to let us go on for two years thinking you were dead! I bought a bit of black for an arm-band. I did, really. Did anybody know, besides Bunter?"

"Only my mother and sister. I put it in a secret trust—you know, the thing you send to executors and people. We shall have an awful time with the lawyers, I'm afraid, proving I'm me. Hullo! Is that friend Sugg?"

"Yes, my lord," said Inspector Sugg, grinning and nearly weeping with excitement. "Damned glad to see your lordship again. Fine piece of work, your lordship. They're all wanting to shake hands with you, sir."

"Oh, Lord! I wish I could get washed and shaved first. Awfully glad to see you all again, after two years' exile in Lambeth. Been a good little show, hasn't it?"

"Is he safe?"

Wimsey started at the agonised cry.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "I forgot the gentleman in the safe. Here, fetch a car, quickly. I've got the great big top Moriarty of the whole bunch quietly asphyxiating at home. Here—hop in, and put the lady in too. I promised we'd get back and save him—though" (he finished the sentence in Parker's ear) "there may be murder charges too, and I wouldn't give much for his chance at the Old Bailey. Whack her up. He can't last much longer shut up there. He's the bloke you've been wanting, the man at the back of the Morrison case and the Hope-Wilmington case, and hundreds of others."

. . . . . .

The cold morning had turned the streets grey when they drew up before the door of the house in Lambeth. Wimsey took the woman by the arm and helped her out. The mask was off now, and showed her face, haggard and desperate, and white with fear and pain.

"Russian, eh?" whispered Parker in Wimsey's ear.

"Something of the sort. Damn! the front door's blown shut, and the blighter's got the key with him in the safe. Hop through the window, will you?"

Parker bundled obligingly in, and in a few seconds threw open the door to them. The house seemed very still. Wimsey led the way to the back room, where the strong-room stood. The outer door and the second door stood propped open with chairs. The inner door faced them like a blank green wall.

"Only hope he hasn't upset the adjustment with thumping at it," muttered Wimsey. The anxious hand on his arm clutched feverishly. He pulled himself together, forcing his tone to one of cheerful commonplace.

"Come on, old thing," he said, addressing himself conversationally to the door. "Show us your paces. Open Sesame, confound you. Open Sesame!"

The green door slid suddenly away into the wall. The woman sprang forward and caught in her arms the humped and senseless thing that rolled out from the safe. Its clothes were torn to ribbons, and its battered hands dripped blood.

"It's all right," said Wimsey, "it's all right! He'll live—to stand his trial."

J. C. Squire

THE ALIBI

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"Stop it, Timmy," whispered Sir Richard, to the spaniel, who had whined.

The mere reflected the last pink flush of wintry sunset, and in the east, high above the far bed of rushes, the wisp of a moon was becoming distincter every time he looked at it. But it had rained in the afternoon when they had driven a few pheasants, and the black clouds massing on the northern horizon looked like more rain. It was getting cold. He blew on his fingers. Damn that fellow Henderson, for wanting to spin the day out like this, and his fluffy hysterical little wife, for egging him on. Just because they had come to the duck-pond before—and she with them—chattering at the wrong moment too just when the first big lot of duck came in. She probably had a pretty bad time with her husband. He remembered last year he had had suspicions of curses and sobbing. But women's admirations took strange direc-

tions. She obviously thought Henderson a Nimrod, and the brute was a rotten bad shot. Keen enough though, in all conscience: liked killing for its own sake, probably. Why do they saddle us with such M.P.'s—profiteers and Colonial adventurers, posing as Tories! Why on earth had he let all the servants go to the fair: cold supper! He was cold already. Again he stared from the sodden little peninsula into the water. He leaned his gun against the solitary tree and lit a cigarette, his hands carefully shadowing the match and the glow of the tip. And not even a man to look after the dog and to carry the birds. Politeness to local members of Parliament could go too far. Bad enough to have such a bumptious blackguard to stay. And that foolish little wife . . . back at the Manor . . . warm . . . reading some silly novel, or confiding some nonsense to that horrible set-faced companion of hers, with her silent movements. How on earth could Henderson let his wife saddle herself with such a death's head?

He heard a snipe but could not see it. He heard the mew of plover, and a black stream of them flashed across the fading sky and away into invisibility. Over there, somewhere in those low thorns Henderson was crouching, and the width of the water between them. The width of the water: the width of the world, he thought. They had nothing in common at all. A small foreboding gust of wind came over moor and marsh, and rattled the leaves of the forlorn trees on the high ridge behind him. It carried a sound with it, a dim sort of brazen music, faint bangs and cries. It was the fair. Three miles away! Doubtless the servants were enjoying themselves. He closed his eyes and saw the excited crowd in the lambent light of the flares, roaring merry-go-rounds, cocoanut shies, wheedling gipsies with games of chance—or, rather, certainty! He opened them, and there was the darkening solitude, the damp wilderness that had been unchanged for thousands of years. Naked savages had seen it so, and on such dismal evenings thought the place bewitched.

He could hear nothing of the fair now. Silence was only broken by the ghostly noises of the swamp, twitters, rushes of wings, little flashes of fish, all eerie now, causing the heart to tighten unreasonably, ominous, as though some evil magnitude was brooding over the place. Richard Moorhouse pulled down his cape, drew the wet flaps of his collar together below his damp beard, and shifted his position on the squelching grass. Henderson was over there somewhere. Everybody knew the man was a swine, with his red face and beastly curling moustache, his crooked eyes and

crooked companions. Except his wife of course: perfectly obvious that nobody told her about *her* precious husband's seraglio. Just the sort to go mad out of jealousy: but she doted. Perhaps she was more cunning than she looked: that companion, Mrs. Rose, had eyes in her head; there was no saying what women mightn't pour out to each other when they were alone. He pulled himself together for the work in hand, and passed his hand along the cold barrel of his gun. The duck must surely come in now from their mysterious haunts, if they were coming at all. If they waited much longer the clouds would be up and across the struggling moon. The mirror of the water was growing darker. Plover cried again. How lonely it was! He stared hard across at Henderson's bank, but there was no form there now, merely a dark tract that was not water. There wasn't a sound anywhere. Henderson couldn't be there. He must have gone away and left him alone. Perhaps he was slinking away now! Weren't those footsteps again? How his nerves were on edge to-night! He would bet that Henderson had never noticed that car that seemed to stop near them just after they had got out, and would explain all those splashes as water rats. But that's what they probably were! A sound again! He whistled, a low wailing note, and waited. Across the water from that dim shore came a reply. Henderson was there, immobile, grim, ready. The whistle roused the dog again, whom he had forgotten. "Down, you fool," he rasped, clouting the spaniel's head.

There was a faint unmistakable whirr of wings: he held his gun ready and peered at the dusk: there was a small splash and a faint contended quacking far to the right. It was almost too late. He'd give it five minutes more, then shout for Henderson, stretch his cramped limbs and stumble the half mile back to the car.

That faint oozy sound again, far away in front of him. The spaniel whined and was angrily kicked. Damn the dog, he ought to have learned sense by now!

Wind rising. No more twilight. Only faint moonlight now. Time to go. A noise of wings and black wedges circling in against the spaces of the clouds. Bang! Bang! He fired both barrels. One splash in front. A clamour away there, a frenzied shout, "Who are you, who are you?" a sharp shot, a scream.

Silence! A splash in the mere. Not a sound. Timmy howled. Not a sound. Yes, a splashing like hurried footsteps, faint in the distance. "My God," he said, in a strange voice that echoed in

his ears. He tried to shout but his mouth was dry and rough and he merely croaked. He scooped up water, swallowed it and shouted. "Henderson! Henderson!" The noise seemed to fill the whole air, but it died in the night. "Henderson!" again he shouted, and knew there would be no reply. The trees shook. Clouds came over the moon and spots of rain fell. The mere was hardly visible now. What horror was over there? He clenched his teeth. He must go.

There was a punt below his feet, but it was full of water and useless. He left his tree and almost fell into the water-filled barrel which long ago had been a hiding-place for duck-shooters. His gun dropped and he picked it up again. He took his torch out and switched it on to guide himself along the neck of bog which led to the mainland: its arc-illuminated tufted rushes, little pits of mud, stones, peaty pools, moths and pointed silver beads of rain. Then some impulse of caution, almost like a voice crying in his ear, made him switch it off again, and he scrambled rapidly along the familiar bank in the rain, with now and then a plunge to the knees in mud and now and then a trip over a curling tree-root. At the western angle of the mere, he stopped, stared into the semi-darkness and listened again. The rain pattered heavily. No trace of a glare was visible from the east where the fair was. A tree creaked. "Wants greasing," he said aloud, not meaning to speak. Then, "I'd better go on. I hope to God he's only wounded. I want company!" and laughed, without amusement, at his brutal humour. Then on in the rain, now with white marks on trunk and stone to guide him, up the slow stream, over the plank, past the willows, through the rushes, until the thorn-bushes filled the sky in front of him. It rained pitilessly now and he was soaked through. But he came to the last corner, and then, stooping, turned on his torch and step by step approached Henderson's lurking place. The spaniel flopped ahead, whimpered, and stood still. At one step nothing was visible but rain and the plants of the bog: at the next the mild rays fell full on the prone plump body of the man. He lay with his legs apart, his arms wide, his hands crisped, his head back, his mouth open. There was a dark stain on the left breast of his shooting jacket and below it—of all things on God's earth—was a dead mallard, beautiful in death though its gay colours were sobered in that light. The spaniel, obedient to his instincts, retrieved the bird and brought it to his master. Moorhouse stared at the picture like a lunatic: he trembled, his lips and teeth seemed beyond his control, he could hardly hold

his gun. Then he laughed in a high voice, and "My bird, I think," he stammered. Then "Don't be a fool," he quavered: then addressing himself sternly, "You've never lost hold over yourself before, Richard Moorhouse, and you'd better not do it now. There's this dead man and here are you. What's to be done?" With an effort he knelt and examined the body. No, never a gun shot, of course. It never sounded like it. A round bullet-hole. But no revolver in the dead man's hand, and not a sign of one on the boggy soil round about. He stood upright, and put out the torch. "I can switch it on whenever I like," he said, as though challenging the dead, and the elements, and some indefinable presence that mocked him. He clicked it on, stared at the body to steady himself, and was about to click it off again when he caught sight of something small and white on the bush to his left, and something at its foot. He reached for it, examined it, put it in his breeches pocket, stared at the dead again and turned away. Then once more he turned, took the duck from the spaniel's mouth, and threw it out to the nearest clump of reeds. Once more he paused, and moved the torchlight-ray over the ground. He picked up Henderson's gun and opened it: yes, it was loaded. Darkness again. A risky game but it had better be done. He fired both triggers. The reports sounded like cannon-shots, but the sounds died, and no distant shout followed them. He ejected the cartridges at Henderson's feet, and laid the gun down again.

He had no need of the torch now, and so constant a will o' the wisp had better not be seen wavering over those sodden lands. First mark the willows. Second mark the biggish tree. Third mark the white post. Fourth mark the hummocks. He had known them all from boyhood, and knew also to a minute the quarter of an hour which would take him, rain or no rain, to pass them all and reach the copse where they had left the car. Well, footprints wouldn't be good on that boggy waste at the best of times, and with rain like this they could look as long as they liked. A good thing his clothes had been soaked in the afternoon. He had gone a quarter of his distance, now grouping, now running, when, ahead of him, he heard a car start with a grinding of gears, run a little way, change up and change again and moan away in the distance towards the south. He smiled to himself acidly: "As a magistrate, I suppose I ought to go to the police. But in the circumstances it would be better not to. I've a revolver licence, apart from anything else . . . shut up, you fool, what are

you talking to yourself for. . . . Henderson, Henderson, Henderson, Henderson. Henderson, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, dead, duck—a duck, duck—a—duck, duck—a—duck." Wanting to yell, he set his jaws tight and closed his fists on his gun, steering his course now by a far cottage light behind pine-trees which had come into sight over a slight rise. The ground fell again and he plunged into a pool of the stream, his splash echoed by another splash. "Pike," he said, "strange how they get here: but it is the spawn on the birds' legs of course."

He reached the lightless car at last, and looked at his watch.

"It must be about midnight," he thought: it was only seven. "Good Lord, if it had been midnight the servants'd have been back at the Manor again," he thought: then cursing because he was tired and wet and must not take the car, left the car behind him and trudged off. There was a mile and a half of winding road, first bare, then thickly arched over with trees: an unpleasant walk, in rain, wind and darkness at the best of times. When nearly home he heard steps approaching and his heart thumped hard. Suppose it was a policeman with one of those damned lanterns. He picked up the spaniel and held it and his gun close up to his body on the hedgeward side. A shapeless figure drew near and passed with a labourer's good night. Something prompted him to reply in a foreign accent, thick and guttural, and he heard the man stop as though he were looking round, and then plod on. "And leaves the world to darkness and to me" came into his head. A few hundred yards more and there was the back entrance where there was no lodge, and the old avenue of elms, and the Manor House, a huddle of shadows, and the garage. Yes, the Hendersons' car was in the next stall. He walked into the garage, turned on the light and put his hand on the bonnet, and smiled ironically: then he drew the doors to, and stole round, avoiding the gravel, to the front of the house. In one second-floor window shone a light. It was Mrs. Henderson's. Moorhouse opened the front door noiselessly, and walked down the hall and got rid of his outer coverings, and turned on the light in the library. He threw a glance round the accustomed files of leather backed books. "Looks damned ordinary," he said. He filled a tumbler half-full of whiskey and drank it neat. Then he walked up to the Georgian mirror which ran the length of the low mantelpiece and stared at his own face. It was white and drawn, the eyes

bright in deep sockets, the lines from nostril to mouth cut deep, the moustache and beard dank. He watched his mouth as he spoke. "A damned interesting position," he said: then added, less deliberately, "provided they don't take too long finding him. That would be trying." Then a thought flashing across his mind, he walked out into the hall. "Quite," he observed, as he picked up an open note which was lying on the largest of the chests: "To Harry and Sir Richard: I was so tired after our day's walking that I've gone to bed. I've had all I want to eat. Don't wake me.—Gladys."

But he thought he heard her moving about upstairs. And then he thought he heard crying and the voice of a comforter. He crept upstairs, feeling like a cowardly spy, and listened. "I wish you hadn't, oh, I wish you hadn't," he heard in Mrs. Henderson's voice; and then the determined mumbling of that woman, the companion. It was enough; he slunk downstairs again. In his own house! Biting his lip he took Mrs. Henderson's note into the library, and watched it drop to ashes in the fire. He went through the library into the study where he kept rods, guns and account books, cleaned his barrels and restored the gun to the leather case which held its twin. His initials were stamped on it, "R.M." "Rotten Mess. . . . Rank Madness," he said: and then wondered why strain should make people talk rubbish aloud. Very deliberately he pressed the spring of a panel cupboard in the wall, drew from one pocket a muddy handkerchief and put it in, and then from another something wrapped in a larger handkerchief. "Let's hope we shan't need them," he said.

He returned to the library, stared at his shadow on the wall, poured out another whiskey and sat down in a deep leather chair before the fire. At what stage ought he to get worried about Henderson's disquieting non-appearance? Over and over again he reconsidered the events of the evening and his own position. It was obvious that he must get alarmed some time, and equally obvious that he had better not be precipitant. The clock whirred and struck nine. If only those damned servants would return, his mind wouldn't dwell so much on ringing up the Titbury police! There was a soft knock at the door. He sprang up, leant against the mantelpiece with his face to the door, and said, "Come in" with visions of policemen flashing across his brain. It was Harbutt, the butler, plump, cheerful and courteous, but abnormal in a smart lounge suit. "Oh, you Harbutt," remarked his master, stifling a sigh of relief, "I thought you were all at the fair."

"So we were, Sir Richard, but some of us 'ave come 'ome. Sick of the weather. The rest of 'em's in a cinema."

"Is there a maid with you?"

"Yes, Sir Richard, Lucy—Simpson that is. And Banks and myself."

"Banks hasn't gone off, I hope?"

"No, Sir Richard, 'e's down warmin' 'imself in the kitchen."

"I may want him to drive the Daimler."

"Nothing wrong I 'ope, Sir Richard?" He thought his master's face looked odd.

"No, I hope not, Harbutt, but Mr. Henderson isn't back and I'm worried about it. And I believe I heard Timmy outside. Mr. Henderson went off in the Chrysler by himself to the duck-pond, and took the dog with him."

"What, our car, sir?"

"Yes, Mrs. Henderson said she might want theirs to run over and see her mother, though in the end she went to bed instead. He ought to have been back two hours ago. He knows the way well enough, but it's damned dark and if he loses his way and collapses he might get rheumatic fever." He gave a little laugh. "We don't want to lose our Member, do we, after taking so much trouble to get him in?"

Harbutt gave an old servant's deferential laugh. "No, Sir Richard. But Banks and I will find him in no time. It's only a matter of shouting and a lantern."

"He may not answer if he is too far gone, you know."

"We'll cover the ground all right, Sir Richard."

"If you don't find him ring me up."

"Yes, Sir Richard, and I will tell Lucy to put a kettle on." He bowed and closed the door. After five minutes there was the roar and dwindling hum of a departing car.

. . . . . .

In the morning, after that sleepless night of trampings, excited servants, and bustling policemen, and the ultimate silence of dawn, since rent by screams from upstairs, he received a message from the companion saying that they must be driven over at once to Mrs. Henderson's mother at Oakhanger, her mistress being unfit to stay in the house any longer. Moorhouse felt a strong revulsion against seeing them off the premises, but, with the servants watching, he thought he had better. His solicitude, as Mrs. Henderson, heavily muffled, was helped along the hall by her

woman, was thrown away. The widow of the murdered man never lifted her head, bowed in a stillness of grief that drew murmurs of pity from Harbutt and the chauffeur; but the stern stony face of the maid, fiery dark eyes and tight mouth, was turned full at him as she disclaimed his aid with a movement of her free arm. "Thank you," she said, "we can look after ourselves"; and then, with a faint ironic smile, "and I hope you can look after *your*self." Of her feelings and intentions towards himself he was uncertain, but her almost passionate concern for her stricken mistress was evident in every movement. Relieved to be able to stand aloof he watched them depart from the steps, wondering at the predicaments in which human beings find themselves, at the secrets they carry about in their breasts, musing on the passions of the wronged, the desperate unscrupulousness of the frightened, the general inability of men and women to see their affairs in a due proportion, having regard to time and space, the awful tale of forgotten years, the movements of land and sea, the uncountable wars and plagues of the past, the vast and remote processions of the stars and nebulæ. Yet, he reflected, as the closed car rolled off and he turned again to his room, he could hardly be expected to be immune from the general human frailty, and his own preservation and comfort, however momentary in the light of the eternities, were of some importance to him. It occurred to him then—for he was honest with himself—that he was, on the whole, a chivalrous man, though his generally ironic, even cynical, manner effectively disguised it from all except the penetrating: and that this indefensible habit of secrecy might well be useful to him.

It was after dinner, a week later. The inquest had been adjourned. He had given his evidence, a candid and straightforward account of the dead man's movements, and his own. It was, up to a point, a very simple story. Henderson had insisted on trying the pond in the evening. He had gone as far as the garage with him, but felt very tired and excused himself to his guest, who had gone on with the car and spaniel—which had found its way home later. He had returned to the house and had never moved outside it until the news that the body had been found reached him. Pressed, very courteously, for further material evidence as to the commission and motive of the crime he had said he was completely in the dark. The technical evidence ruled out suicide: the bullet was of a common type: no pistol had been found, which was not surprising with a large and muddy lake at hand. Nothing

which looked like the faintest clue appeared at the inquest except that a labourer produced a vague statement about having passed a man who spoke with a foreign accent in a dark lane near the Manor. Witness could not say whether the man was carrying a gun, but could swear he was not followed by a dog: the solicitor privately apologised to Moorhouse for being compelled to ask absurd questions which might seem to hint in his direction.

"Your questions were quite proper, but I am afraid your apology is not," Moorhouse had said with a quick smile which relieved his worried neighbour, who, once a year, was asked to shoot. The foreign accent offered the one faint gleam of hope, and the newspapers "understood" that inquiries were being made in South Africa, where it was believed the dead man had made enemies. Mrs. Henderson might still throw light on the mystery, but she was, for the moment, ill from shock. The maid, Mrs. Rose, gave formal evidence: she knew nothing about Mr. Henderson's affairs, having been with the family only three months. It was believed by the Press that the business associates of the "shot M.P." might be of assistance; one of them told a reporter that a year ago he had heard Henderson muttering something about "blackmail" after receiving a cable from somewhere abroad. For the rest, there had not been a hint, except that a few of the more enterprising newspaper gossipers had thought fit to keep the name and record of Sir Richard Moorhouse before the public. "Just in case, I suppose," he reflected with a downward droop of the bearded lips, as he noticed casual paragraphs in which sympathy with him led by an easy transition to accounts of his pedigree, birth, and education, his brief marriage to "a beautiful but delicate wife who died at Titford Manor," and innocent references to him as "a great reader, with a particular penchant for criminology," "a keen student of nature," "a fine shot," "a noted pedestrian," "at one time much sought after as an amateur actor," and a "world-traveller who might, in 1908, have met in Johannesburg (where he stayed for several months) the young prospector Henry Henderson whose path crossed his so tragically twenty years after." Near, but not too libellously adjoining, the latest of these paragraphs he noticed an interesting reference to the "only peer ever hanged for murder," the mad Earl Ferrers, who murdered his servant, and went proudly to his death clad in white silk and riding in his private coach. What was to prevent anybody from wondering whether the Law wouldn't add a baronet to its gruesome bag? Nothing obviously:

but he thought he had done his best so far to avert the calamity and if he had to play his last card he had to play it—or rather the next to the last, for the last of all he shrank from contemplating. Conscience spoke with an uncertain voice, or rather with several conflicting voices.

It was half-past nine. He was in the library in his dinner jacket, stretched in a chair, smoking a cigar and reading, as detachedly as he was able, a volume on "Circumstantial Evidence." As he read, his heart beat violently at certain cases and conclusions. The book was on his knees and he was ruminating on the extent to which the externally self-controlled among men may be tremulously emotional within, when the butler, pleased that his master should be visited by an old friend and evening companion, complacently announced Major French. French had been at school with him and lived near: but he also happened to be Chief Constable of the County.

There was a slightly feverish cordiality in French's greeting as he entered, with "How d'ye do, Dick. You don't mind my calling at this hour, do you, and in these clothes. No, no, it's not too hot. This chair will do perfectly. Well, emm, I don't know . . . perhaps . . . well, yes, a small spot of whiskey."

"Almost refused my drink," thought Moorhouse, acutely conscious of a barrier, and observing that French, slightly froglike with his round face and plump waistcoat and hips, was sitting on the edge of his chair. He brought his guest the glass of whiskey, and looked him right in the eyes. "Does he see," he thought, as he mustered a frank and friendly expression, "a glaze of defence and hypocrisy in my eyes also?"

"You must need it," he said aloud, "I expect this wretched case is giving you an awful amount of trouble. I'm damned glad you've come, it's the first normal thing that's happened here for a week."

French took a large draught and looked round the room, challenged his host with his eyes and said:

"Look here, Moorhouse—Dick—I don't want you to be under any misapprehension. It's about this case that I've come to talk to you. There's nobody within earshot, I suppose?"

"Not unless you have a guard of police outside," said Moorhouse. The Chief Constable winced slightly.

"I happen to have two men with me in the ordinary way, but they have no instructions to eavesdrop. I have come to you as an old friend."

"You mean," said Moorhouse jocularly, "that nothing I say will be used in evidence against me!"

"There is no charge against you. I've merely come to you privately to see if you have anything to add to what you said before."

"Are you sure you are doing the correct thing in giving me what almost sounds like a warning?"

"You can leave me to decide upon that. I have other duties too. Ethel was my cousin, after all [Moorhouse felt sick at the mention of his dead wife], and you and I have been on terms of friendship for many years."

Words flashed across Moorhouse's brain: "Yes, you little blighter, you were my fag, and I wangled this job for you, and you always come to me to pour out your tribulations and my whiskey. Oh, you're not so bad in your way, but you are insufferably stupid." Almost simultaneously he said:

"Look here, Ted, be frank with me, what is it that is troubling you?" French thawed at the warmth of the accustomed atmosphere, walked over and helped himself to another drink in the old way, and almost forgot his suspicion.

"I'm glad you're making it easy for me, Dick. The fact is you may be having an awkward time ahead of you. Of course you know very well that I myself should never dream that you, of all people, could have anything to do with, er . . ."

"A murder, you mean. I should damn well think not."

"You're quite right. Now, let's talk it over sensibly. You understand, I dare say, that what we're talking about is not what your old friends know, but evidence."

"And evidence is a curious thing, of course. Fire away."

"Well, we've been working at this case and we've got nowhere, nowhere at all."

"And you're back at the Manor."

"Not to put too fine a point on it, we are. You see," French went on in his old confiding way, forgetting for the time whom he was talking about, "we have to follow any clue that is offered to us, and . . ."

"Let me tell you once and for all, Ted, that you can discuss this case as if it didn't involve me at all. Look here, I'll save you embarrassment. I'll outline the whole bloody thing myself, if you like!"

French squirted from a syphon into his glass.

"I wish you would," he said.

"Very well. Mr. Henry Henderson, M.P., an unpleasant man of doubtful antecedents, with an ill-treated wife . . ."

"Who said she was ill-treated?"

"I did. But never mind. She at least would never be suspected by anyone. At all events this malodorous, though virile and energetic man, was staying, in his capacity as chosen of the electorate, with Sir Richard Moorhouse at Titford Manor. Is that all right?"

"Oh of course it is."

"On a certain evening of November 1928, Mr. Henderson was found dead by Sir Richard Moorhouse's duck-pond. Two dead ducks accounted for the discharge of his gun barrels and he had obviously been killed by a pistol shot fired by another hand."

"That's all right so far as it goes," said French, looking vacantly, glass in hand, into the great fire of logs.

"Obviously, and perhaps I can skip the rest of the obvious. The question is, who did it?"

"Of course, who did it?"

"Now the first certainty is that it must have been done either by somebody who went to the duck-pond with Mr. Henderson or by somebody who was following his movements, tracked him closely there, for the night was dark and the path difficult, and shot him. It is admitted by Sir Richard Moorhouse that he started for the duck-pond with Mr. Henderson and a spaniel. But Sir Richard states that he only went as far as the garage, that he sent the spaniel on with Mr. Henderson, and that the spaniel returned alone later in the evening. For all this there is no evidence but his own word: the servants were all out. Mrs. Henderson and her companion were upstairs, as he agrees. For the moment we return to the other supposition: that some person unknown with some motive unknown for killing him had been lurking in the neighbourhood for some days."

"Not necessarily for some days," interjected French, the sense of evidence strong in him.

"Well, probably for some days, as the best of opportunities would probably not occur on the night of this stranger's arrival. However, it is immaterial. If we assume the stranger, we must ask ourselves whom Henderson may have injured, and who would have so strong a motive for revenge against him as to plan his deliberate murder."

"Yes," French muttered.

"The obvious place to look, especially after that rather sketchy statement of the man who heard a foreign accent, was South

Africa. Enemies could certainly be traced there, but—this I assume without knowledge—all those who could be identified were either dead or in jail."

"Yes, confound it!" said French.

"The jail-birds wouldn't speak; the dead couldn't; the woman he lived with couldn't be traced."

"How did you know that?" exclaimed French, with a sudden shrewd look in his eye.

"Oh," replied Moorhouse, flicking off the ash of his cigarette, "I didn't know: I merely guessed it. Persons of his kidney have always lived with women and have always deserted them. Poor creature! I bet she had a hell of a time with him. A man like that would be enough to drive a woman mad! However, the plain truth is that Africa yielded you nothing, and you came back here. And coming back here, you—I mean, of course, your colleagues—have been unable to restrain a certain amount of curiosity about myself—shared, I may say, by the newspapers—though they are diffident about saying so."

"I wish you wouldn't talk so wildly," said French. "It's very uncomfortable for me, and you ought to know that I wish you well out of this."

"I assure you," replied Moorhouse, "that I am not in the least wild, and you know it. You know, moreover, that, having returned to the consideration of myself, you discovered certain facts that might tend, if supported, to suggest that I went to the duck-pond with Henry Henderson, that I crept round upon him in the dark, and that I shot him, and left him, and then stole home by unfrequented ways."

"We've got a few facts. They don't amount to much one way or the other. I never said you did it. It's ridiculous."

"Nothing could be more ridiculous," said Moorhouse, now pacing up and down before the fire, and shooting continual keen glances at his old fag, "but it is not for the police to rule hypotheses out, is it? Remember what virtuous people have committed murder—professors, clergymen, retired colonels, Sunday-school teachers, suburban violinists! Why not a widower baronet, for a change? Especially as he had frequently been heard to say that the world would be much better off without swine like Henderson in it."

"I never said you said that."

"No, but I did, often; and you've got it all down in little note-books; and I say it again, and you can take it down again,

if you like. But this of course isn't the most important thing, is it?"

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"My dear Chief Constable, you have a perfectly sound glimmering of what I mean, though you can hardly conceive that you are right, or that I should have the audacity to mention it."

"I don't know, all the same," said French, obstinately, not without betraying in his expression the hope of learning something new.

"No," said Moorhouse, with a sudden access of energy, "I'm not telling you anything you don't know already. There's nothing to tell. I'm merely referring to your discovering that one of my pistols is missing."

"How the devil——"

"Naturally I was not let uninformed that your police had paid me a little call when I was well-known to be off the premises. One of the pistols has gone!"

"That's the deuce of it!" said French—and Moorhouse felt a slight renewed affection for him, as it became clear that he had tried to shirk or rebut this evidence in his own mind. "Where is it?"

"If I knew where it was," cried Moorhouse impatiently, "we shouldn't be having all this bother. I suppose somebody's been cleaning it, and left it somewhere."

"But," said French, more stiffly, "your butler saw you showing it to the whole Henderson family only the day before."

"What!" said Moorhouse, quietly, but in surprise, "You mean that Harbutt said that? Harbutt? Oh, all right, it's true enough. I suppose he was quite right to tell the truth. Lies in these affairs always get found out."

"You're right enough there," French observed, "we're pretty well accustomed to lies, and know the sound of them."

"Well," Moorhouse went on, "you don't suppose, Ted, that I've been telling lies to-night, do you?"

"I believe every word you say," said French, "but it's ugly all the same. What about what Mrs. Henderson was overheard to say to that companion when she was getting her into the car here?"

"Whatever it was, it's news to me," replied Moorhouse boldly. "Who heard it?"

"My men—and your servants, I suppose."

"What did she say?"

"Very little, but a jury might think it had great significance. It was 'Oh, Sir Richard, oh, Sir Richard!'"

"That's not much from a hysterical woman, is it?"

"Possibly not, possibly it is, or a jury might think so. We have often got clues from hysteria. She might have said more if that companion of hers hadn't shut her up."

"Yes, the dragon," said Moorhouse, "I suppose I ought to be obliged to her, even if she has got the stony face of a Medusa. But listen to me now. What does all this amount to?"

"How can I tell what a jury might think, or what further clues mightn't turn up? Of course, I take your word for it you're innocent; but even if there isn't enough to go on, you're not going to escape suspicion."

"And it isn't going to leave me, eh? A pleasant prospect!"

"It isn't much. You'd be all right with a decent alibi," said French, fencing with his eyes.

"Not always procurable," sighed Moorhouse, "even by the least guilty of men."

The telephone rang in the adjoining study. "Excuse me a moment," said Moorhouse, "I was expecting an answer to a message, and this is probably it." He passed through the folding doors, left them open and spoke in the dark in full hearing of his visitor:

"Yes. . . . Is that Mrs. Rose? . . . Yes. . . . I'm very sorry. . . . Oh, yes, I found it and I've got it! . . . It was rather careless, you know. . . . A man must protect himself. Can't be helped. . . . I think so. . . . In the last resort, but it has to be. . . . Good night. . . . I hope she's better."

When he returned to the library—once more to press a drink upon the willing French—his face wore a look both anxious and determined. He paced up and down the room with quick strides, and then, facing French squarely, said quietly: "I've been telling you lies."

French was proud of his equilibrium as a policeman, and his plump face assumed a supercilious expression. "So I have observed all the time," he said.

"Very penetrating of you," said Moorhouse, "I suppose you imagine that I am going to say that I was there when Henderson was murdered?"

French flushed and stammered: "I don't see why you should. . . . I mean . . ."

Moorhouse's mouth drooped in an acid smile. "Never mind;

at any rate you will be relieved. Your people need hardly go further with their conjectures. I have just been authorised to disclose my alibi."

"But you said you were here," said French.

"So I was," replied Moorhouse. "With Mrs. Henderson."

There was a pause.

"Oh, I see," said French, lamely, "you sent him out because you were in love with his wife."

"No," remarked Moorhouse, shrinking from the suggestion, "don't take it too seriously. This isn't one of those intrigues that end in a marriage."

French rose, helped himself abstractedly to a cigarette, and muttered that he must be going. Then he added, half-heartedly, "What witness had you?"

"Oh," said Moorhouse, "her maid was about. They are very thick with each other."

"I'm sorry, Dick," said French. "The last thing I wanted to do was to embarrass you. But there is one thing still, you know."

"Well?" asked Moorhouse.

"The pistol."

"Oh, that's easy enough! Forgive me a moment, will you?" Moorhouse went into the study, opened the cupboard, took out a pistol in a handkerchief, carefully wiped it with the handkerchief and brought it into the library. "There she is!" he said, jocularly.

"But why didn't you produce this before?" asked French.

"My dear boy, simply because I wanted to test your faith in me."

"We've got our duty to do," mumbled French shamefacedly.

"Yes, I know you have. It was damned brutal of me. But I'm not quite myself. You've never been suspected of a murder. 'Pon my word I don't believe you ever will be! Sorry, old boy," he said.

"Oh, you're just the same as ever," laughed French, finishing his drink.

He showed French out, and returned to the library.

"Extraordinary," he said to himself, "that that woman Rose could have been with the Hendersons for three months and that he should never have found out that his wife knew who she was. . . . Poor devil. . . . But he got what he deserved. . . . It was rather stupid of me not to guess the right one at the start, but it hardly mattered which of his two women put him out of the world."

Sir Basil Thomson

THE VANISHING OF MRS. FRASER

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If I had ever had any doubts about the almost uncanny cleverness of Mr. Pepper they were dispelled by the way in which he managed the case of Mrs. Fraser. True, his first theory had to be abandoned; but it was he who brought the mystery under his searchlight and probed it to the bottom.

On arriving at the office one day, I found him frowning over a typewritten sheet which purported to be a translation from a paragraph from one of the Paris newspapers. The covering letter, I remember, ran as follows:

> "DEAR PEP,—This is something you need to take care of. I would mail you the original but I think you don't read the lingo.
>
> "Yours cordially,
>
> "WINSTON E. SLACK."

It was the first intimation I had had that Mr. Pepper was called "Pep" by his intimates.

The cutting related to the alleged disappearance of a Scottish lady, Mrs. Fraser, in Paris, under circumstances which were highly suspicious, if they were true. Supplemented by information that came to me at a later stage, the story was as follows:

Mrs. Fraser and her daughter Mary had been passing the winter in Naples. They left in April and travelled through to Paris without stopping. At the Midi Station a porter trundled a vast trunk to the cab rank and called up a cabman with a pallid, broad face framed in a bushy red beard, who refused to accept the trunk. If it did not sow the seeds of disease in him, he said, it would certainly kill his horse. Mary Fraser, who was the linguist of the two, reasoned with him, and in the end persuaded him to accept the two, trunk and all, for ten francs. They drove to that little family hotel in the Rue Cambon, the Hotel des Etrangers, much frequented by English people with slender means. There followed a fresh dispute with Redbeard, who said that the trunk had strained the springs of his cab, and that sixteen francs was the least that he would take. Mary Fraser, being firm, came to a compromise for twelve; the cabman went off hurling his frank opin-

ion of the English at the concierge, and Mary entered the hotel to find her mother collapsing on a seat in the hall. It fell to Mary to enter their names in the hotel register. She chanced to notice that the name just above theirs was "Dupont," executed with an elaborate flourish to indicate, I suppose, that the writer was a person of consideration.

The front room in the entre-sol was assigned to them. It was an old-fashioned room with a wooden bedstead, a peeling flowered wallpaper, and a threadbare carpet, but all was clean. Mary had to help her mother up the stairs and lay her on the bed. Her strength seemed to have given way. The porter staggered up the stairs with the trunk and dumped it on the floor: Mrs. Fraser groaned with pain at the noise. To her daughter's anxious questions, she answered faintly that she was feeling very ill: that she supposed it was fatigue; that she might sleep. But she was flushed and swollen, and Miss Fraser determined to send for a doctor, and went down to the Manageress.

A doctor? Yes, the Manageress knew a very good doctor—Duphot was his name. All her English visitors when they were ill sent for him and spoke well of him afterwards: she could get him to the hotel in five minutes. Presently Dr. Duphot made his appearance. He was the typical French doctor, as round as a ball, wearing a black beard cut like a spade. Mary explained the case as well as she could. The doctor listened without speaking, and then made a systematic examination of the sick woman. At last he stood up and addressed Mary Fraser:

"Mademoiselle, there is no cause for anxiety. I shall telephone for the necessary remedies. In the meantime, stay here with Madame. I shall return in a few moments."

Mrs. Fraser had sunk back exhausted. She was breathing quickly and seemed to be half-delirious. The doctor tarried, and at last Mary, unable any longer to bear the strain, went out to the head of the stairs to call him. She did not go down because from her position she could see his back and shoulders in the telephonebox. He seemed to be speaking emphatically; and the Manageress was hovering about outside, listening. Why all this fuss about her mother unless she were very ill indeed? Mary could bear the suspense no longer: she was on her way down when the doctor left the box and met her on the stairs.

"You should not have left your mother, Mademoiselle!" he said gravely, leading the way back into the sickroom. "Now listen; there is no cause for anxiety, but it will save time if you

go yourself to fetch the drug I require. My colleague, whose address is on this card, will give it to you. As soon as you receive it, come back. I have ordered a cab for you. You can quite safely leave your mother in my care. It is only for a few minutes: you will soon be back."

There seemed nothing to do but to obey. Mary ran down to the cab and drove off. The sun had set: it began to grow dark as the cab threaded its way through a maze of narrow streets. The distance seemed interminable. At last they crossed the Seine and plunged into another maze. Mary became uneasy and questioned the driver, who answered shortly that the house was now quite near. But it was dark when at last they pulled up at the door of a large block of flats. In spite of the distance they had come, Miss Fraser was surprised at the lowness of the fare. She climbed the interminable stairs to the fifth floor, and touched the bell. The door flew open and a florid woman in a decorated dressing-gown received her as the expected guest. She took her into a tiny sitting-room and bade her feel at home. The doctor was expected every moment: he had gone out on the very business of Mrs. Fraser's illness. And then she branched out into the wonders of Paris. Did Mademoiselle know Paris? Was she under the charm of this capital of the world, so different from London with its gloom and its fogs? She would buy dresses? No? Ah, there was the telephone. Such an infliction, these telephones. She bustled off into the next room and through the communicating door Mary Fraser heard half the conversation and understood about a sixth of it. "Up till what hour?" "Eleven?" "Good"—and the conversation ceased. She waited many minutes: her hostess did not return. A clock struck a half-hour. The clock in the room marked eight: her wrist-watch nine-thirty. Heavens, had she been all that time? She would wait no longer. She distrusted this glib, plausible woman. A terror lest she had fallen into a trap began to take hold of her. She crept softly out into the hall to let herself out by the front door. It was locked. She was trapped.

In her terror she shouted "Madame!" The door of the telephone room was next to that of the sitting-room. She knocked and, getting no answer, turned the handle. That, too, was locked. She beat upon it with her hands.

The door flew open and there stood Madame, flaming with indignation. What was this? Why all this noise? Locked in? Impossible! No one but their two selves was in the flat. She had not locked the front door and therefore, if it was locked, it was Made-

moiselle herself. If she chose to leave just when the doctor was due—he had telephoned that he was coming—well, she was free to go. Mary saw her fumbling in her pocket for the key, and she was first to the door to pull on it. Madame tried it herself and cried, "Tiens! It is indeed locked, but how?" Could she herself have turned the key in absence of mind? What an extraordinary thing! And so saying, she released the catch and threw it open. Before she could close it again Mary was through the gap and racing down the stairs, hearing imploring cries of "Mademoiselle!" growing fainter behind her.

Safe in the street she was not free from her troubles. It had begun to rain and not a vehicle, not even a foot passenger, was to be seen. She hurried from street to street all silent and deserted. At the last she saw the lights of a vehicle which stopped and discharged passengers. She ran and reached it breathless just as the horse began to move. It was a cab and a cab ready for a fare. She gave the name of her hotel and settled down for the interminable drive. But it was not interminable. Two streets, a bridge, the Place de la Concorde, the Rue Cambon, and in five minutes she was at her hotel. It was closed. She rang and a night porter—one she did not know—appeared and asked her politely what she wanted. She replied that she wanted to return to her room. The man admitted her and asked for her name. Fraser? Was she registered? "Yes," she said. "Produce the register and I will show you." But the name of Fraser was not in the register, nor the name of "Dupont," the gentleman who wrote his name with a flourish, nor any other name that she had seen on the page.

"This is the Hotel des Etrangers, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, but you must have mistaken your hotel."

She looked round the hall. It was the same. She asserted that she had been given No. 4 on the first floor.

"No, Mademoiselle," said the man, consulting the room list. "There is no one in No. 4."

"Then send for the Manageress." But this, it seemed, was not to be thought of. When Madame had once retired for the night it would cost him his place if he disturbed her. Mademoiselle had better try to find her own hotel: it must be one of the others in that street. But Mademoiselle was firm. If he would not call the Manageress she would, if she had to force her way into every room in the house. He went off unwillingly to do the deed that might cost him his place and presently Madame, in a dressing-

gown and curling pins, appeared. It was the same woman, stern, uncompromising and cold.

"You wish, Mademoiselle . . . ?"

"Madame, you know me. I want to go to my mother." The woman looked puzzled.

"Please explain yourself, Mademoiselle. I have never seen you before." Mary explained; the register was consulted; the woman persisted that she knew nothing of her story. No doctor had been summoned to the hotel that evening. None of the guests had complained of illness. But, as Mademoiselle appeared to be lost and the hour was late, she would let her sleep there. In the morning she could go to the British Consulate!

And so Mary was assigned a room on the second floor and when all was quiet she took her candle and crept softly down to No. 4 to find her mother. The number was on the door; she was in the room, but it was not the same room. There were no roses on an old wallpaper, but a blue art wallpaper, devoid of pattern: no wooden bedstead, but a brass bedstead of the modern kind: no worn carpet, but a staring new floor covering. The washhandstand was of mahogany with a white marble top. The crockery was different, and so were the chairs. It was not the same room. She was worn out. In her own room she sobbed herself to sleep.

They brought her coffee in the morning, and when she went downstairs to pay for it she found that there was no charge. The Manageress, repenting of her rudeness overnight, was polite and even sympathetic.

At ten o'cleck she related her story to the British Vice-Consul, whose only comment was to ask her for the address of her relations in England. It was clear that he did not believe her, but she gave him the address of her uncle in Kensington. He introduced her to a colleague, a pleasant man of middle-age, who took her out to lunch with his wife. She gathered that he was the Consulate doctor, and that he was probing her hallucination to its source. His wife, to whom she told her story, was the first person who believed her, and perhaps it was this sensible lady who procured her another interview with the Vice-Consul and an offer to accompany her to the hotel. He explained his mission to the Manageress, who consented to a questioning of the hotel servants on one condition—that the Police Commissary of the district should be present.

This functionary arrived presently with his clerk and a semi-

official enquiry was opened. Mary told her story and the Commissary remarked judicially that two witnesses ought to be called —the redbearded cabman and Dr. Duphot. The clerk went to the telephone while the Manageress was answering the Vice-Consul's questions. She reasserted that she had never seen Mary Fraser before she arrived late in the evening, that no doctor had been summoned and no lady had complained of illness. The Vice-Consul scrutinised the hotel register and then the cabman was announced. He, too, had never seen Mary, had carried no large trunk, had driven no one to the hotel on the previous day. Yes, he had driven foreigners, of course, but never to this hotel for several weeks. And then the doctor—the same man with his square cut beard. He had never seen Mademoiselle in his life—nor had he been called to the hotel yesterday, or indeed for more than three weeks. His evidence was strictly professional and the more convincing on that account. The Vice-Consul asked to see the room, to question the concierge, and when all was done he took leave ceremoniously and escorted Mary to the Consulate.

She, poor girl, saw from his manner that he was now convinced beyond hope of redemption that she was mentally unstable, but at the Consulate she had no time for brooding: her uncle had arrived from London. Mr. Anderson, of Mincing Lane and Vicarage Gate, was not a sympathetic person. He had quarrelled with his sister, Mrs. Fraser, many years before and he had come over in response to the Consul's telegram unwillingly—from what he called a sense of duty, which was really, though he did not know it, the insistence of his wife. After a brief interview with the Vice-Consul he announced that they were leaving by the train at four, and that they must leave for the Gare du Nord immediately.

It was a melancholy journey. Mr. Anderson made no reference to his sister, and if he spoke at all it was about the weather. Mary replied in monosyllables. Her aunt's warm-hearted welcome made up for much, but she, too, said nothing about her mother, nor about Paris or their travels. It was very late and all trooped off to bed. Mary did not sleep.

The details of the story reached me at a later date. All that we had at first was the paragraph in the French newspaper which had published a garbled version of gossip from the Consulate clerks. Mr. Pepper was pondering noisily: I did not like to interrupt him, although to me the case seemed simple enough. Miss Fraser, I thought, must be one of those neurotic young women who imagine things. She must have lost first her memory, then

her luggage and then herself. The hotel she pitched on as the site for her hallucination about the loss of her mother refused to admit her, and somewhere her mother must be searching for her and for all we knew might already have found her. Mr. Pepper fetched a book from the laboratory—an American book about Secret Societies—and while he was turning over the pages with his thick fingers I ventured to ask whether he had formed any theory. He made no answer until he had found the passage he was looking for, and then he said, "I want to hear what you think, Mr. Meddleston-Jones." I told him. He gave a short laugh.

"The young woman was telling the truth."

"Then you think it was a murder?—that she murdered her mother?"

"Not at all." There was a triumphant note in his voice that convinced me that he had solved the problem. I was puzzled and expectant.

"You noticed," he went on, "that the daughter described how she was spirited away to the other side of Paris and detained there for hours."

"To get her out of the way?"

"And that when she returned she found the room entirely changed—new wallpaper, new furniture, a new carpet."

"You mean that they re-furnished the room while she was away? But why, unless someone had murdered her."

"And that these two ladies had come from Naples?"

"Yes, but I don't see the connection——"

"Evidently you've never heard of the Mafia." Light was beginning to dawn on me.

"You mean, Mr. Pepper, that she was kidnapped by the Mafia."

"I mean that this lady, Mrs. Fraser, had been dabbling in Naples with politics, as so many of your English women do; that the Mafia took her measure and hunted her out of the place; that she knew too much. First they tried to poison her on the train—a waiter in the restaurant-car dropped a pinch of powder into her food, but she was a Scotchwoman and it wasn't strong enough—and then they went to work in Paris in their usual way. They terrorised the hotel management, the cabman and the others; got the daughter out of the way, terrorised the furniture man and changed the room——"

"But the doctor?"

"Oh, he wasn't a doctor at all. He was the head of the Mafia

outfit in Paris. I think I could lay my finger on him in five minutes."

"And Mrs. Fraser is dead?"

"Probably not dead yet: she is being held to ransom while they are going through her papers. If she can't pay they will drop her into the Seine in a sack, probably to-morrow or on Thursday."

"Do you know that Mrs. Fraser is the sort of woman who would dabble in Neapolitan politics, Mr. Pepper?"

"They all do, or if they don't the Mafia think they do, which comes to the same thing."

"But this is frightful. What are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to get the Mafia outfit before they get me. That's what I am going to do. I may want you to run over to Paris some day this week. You speak French, I know." He had risen and was putting on his coat. I took the hint and made for the Club with my head full of the impending fate of that poor lady held to ransom in the attic of a filthy Italian lodging-house, with death hanging over her head.

The only man in the smoking-room was Jimmy Boyd, whose practice at the Bar was growing so fast that one scarcely saw him in these days. He laid down his evening paper and seemed inclined to talk.

"Someone told me that you were mixed up with that Yankee detective fellow, Pepper," he said. "What's all this nonsense about a Mrs. Fraser and the Mafia?" He pointed to a paragraph and gave it me to read. These reporters are extraordinarily indiscreet. Nothing escapes them. The paragraph was an English version of the French newspaper account, but it went on to say that Mr. Pepper, "the world-famous American detective," was engaged upon the case and that sensational developments were expected; that there was now reason to believe that Mrs. Fraser had been the victim of a widespread secret conspiracy, from which, unless it was unmasked by Mr. Pepper, no English traveller would be safe.

"What I want to know," said Boyd, "is the identity of Mrs. Fraser. It is a common name. In my dancing days I used to know a mother and daughter of that name. They lived in Hampstead when they were not travelling abroad. They were charming people. I wouldn't have anything happen to them for worlds."

I had to confess that I did not know them, and could not say where they lived.

"This Pepper fellow who is always getting his name into the

newspapers——" At this moment a club waiter came up and, addressing Boyd, said, "You are wanted on the telephone, sir." He left me for a few minutes and returned in some excitement.

"A most extraordinary thing, Meddleston-Jones. Do you know who called me on the telephone? Miss Fraser herself. She wants me to go to her in Kensington at once. Have you had lunch?" I had not. "Because I want you to go with me. She asked me whether I knew anyone who could help her and begged that I would bring him with me."

I had no thought of lunch, nor had he. While we were bowling along to Vicarage Gate he told me about Miss Fraser's journey and her position in her uncle's house—disbelieved by everyone and treated as a person suffering from delusions. All this she had contrived to tell him on the telephone after two unsuccessful attempts to find him earlier in the day.

Miss Fraser was at luncheon when we arrived, but she came out of the dining-room at once. She was a handsome, slender girl of about twenty-five, a little nervous and overwrought, but perfectly collected. I hung back when she showed us into her uncle's den, something in her manner and Boyd's having warned me that they had better be left alone together. In earlier days, I fancy that there must have been a dawning romance between them.

Presently I was called in to hear the whole story from her lips. I don't know what Boyd had been saying about me, but she treated me as if I were a master of detective science—as if I were the Master himself. It was very flattering to my self-esteem. I was certain after hearing and seeing her that Mr. Pepper had been right: she was telling me the actual truth, but when Boyd said suddenly, "I believe that Mr. Meddleston-Jones is prepared to cross by the next boat if you ask him," I was taken aback. How could I do this without consulting Mr. Pepper?

"You see," said Boyd, "I don't speak French, and I've an important case on to-morrow or I'd come with you. According to the papers you, or this Pepper fellow, have got a theory and you can run it to ground while the scent is fresh. I see that you took notes of the names while Miss Fraser was telling her story. Will you go?"

I looked at my watch. There was just time to catch the four o'clock train. My chief himself had talked about sending me to Paris. Why should I not surprise him? Leaving Jimmy Boyd with Miss Fraser, who really seemed quite grateful to me, I went back to the Club to cash a cheque and to scribble a note to Mr. Pepper

telling him that business had taken me to Paris for a day or two and that I would keep my eyes open while I was there. I gave him my Paris address in case he should wish to communicate with me.

I pondered deeply over the case on my way over: somehow Mr. Pepper's theory, fantastic though it was, that the daughter was purposely got rid of while the mother was being spirited away and the aspect of the room was changed, did seem to fit the facts. For what other reason could the page in the register have been tampered with? Mrs. Fraser was poor; if the photograph shown to me by her daughter did not lie, she was unattractive, but the people who thought it worth while to take all this trouble to kidnap her and cover up their tracks were Southerners actuated by motives quite different from those of reasoning beings like ourselves—motives which Mr. Pepper seemed to understand and I did not.

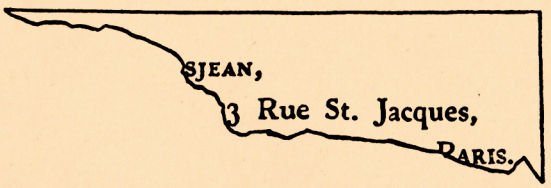
I drove from the Nord Station to the Hotel des Etrangers in the Rue Cambon. I was received by the Manageress, who, to do her justice, did not at all look like a person who would be intimidated into doing what she did not want to do by an Italian with a pistol. I felt that if terrorising were resorted to in our relations it would be exercised by her without having recourse to any pistol. She did not seem to take to me.

She assigned me a room on the second floor at the back which lent itself to the comedy I intended to play on the morrow. At about nine in the morning I sought her out at the receipt of custom and complained about my room. I was, she was surprised to hear, a literary person, travelling for my health, and I had been medically recommended always to choose a front room on the first floor in every hotel I stayed at. Expense was no object. The lady was sorry but firm. She could not turn the people out of their rooms to meet my wishes: the front rooms of every floor were engaged. I was equally firm. I liked the hotel, but not its back bedrooms. I was writing my experiences for the English papers and if I had been comfortable, I should have liked to mention the Hotel des Etrangers in my article. As it was——

"You write, Monsieur? Tiens! There is certainly a room, but it is newly-decorated, and smells of paint. Would Monsieur like to see it?"

I will not try to describe my emotions when I saw the room in which the drama or tragedy of Mrs. Fraser had been enacted. Miss Fraser's account of it was photographic in its accuracy. My luggage was moved down and I was at last able to lock the door

against interruption. My first business was to search the room from top to bottom in order to discover who had supplied the new furniture in a desperate hurry. The furniture itself disclosed no maker's name, but when I turned back the carpet I was lucky enough to find half a torn billhead:



My conjectures about the case had now taken a more concrete form. There might be other more cogent reasons for getting rid of Mrs. Fraser than the suspicions of a secret society, and a news paragraph from Naples had given me a new line to work upon. If I was successful it was Mr. Pepper's wonderful intuition that had furnished me with the first clue and no credit attaches to me, his humble fellow-worker.

With the scrap of paper in my pocket-book I set out on foot for the Rue St. Jacques and visited in turn No. 3, 13, 23, none of which was a shop bearing any name ending in SJEAN, but No. 33 bore the name "Grosjean" in gilt letters over the shop window, and M. Grosjean dealt in wallpapers, paints and bathroom furniture. I walked in boldly and asked the young man for patterns of wallpapers. He showed me hundreds, but found me hard to please. Not one was of the shade of dark blue that I was looking for. I demanded an interview with the manager, who was vapouring about the office at the back. He emerged a little unwillingly, I thought.

"I have not seen all your patterns, Monsieur."

"Yes, Monsieur; we have no others."

"Forgive me, but the pattern I have set my heart on is that which you used in papering the front first-floor bedroom of an hotel in the Rue Cambon last Thursday. You remember, you did it in two hours at the special desire of the authorities?"

The curious change in his features warmed my heart. He was quite a nice-looking French paperhanger when he first came in; he was an unpleasant paperhanger to look upon when I had done with him. Alarm, consternation, suppressed fury possessed his expressive features in turn, and when words failed him and he

was reduced to inarticulate hissing, I said suavely, "Used it all up, did you? Well, I am sorry. Good morning."

I took a cab for my next visit, feeling sure that my paperhanger was busy with his telephone.

The policeman on duty in the police station of the Arrondissement was polite but perfectly firm in insisting that I should divulge my business before I had a private interview with his Commissary. He found me equally firm, and when I paltered with the truth and said that I represented *The Times* newspaper in London he departed from his desk to take counsel. Presently he returned and beckoned to me. The Commissary was suspicious and short with me. I said, "Monsieur the Commissary, is it an offence to tamper with an hotel register?"

"If you have a complaint to make, Monsieur, I am listening."

"I assume, Monsieur, that it is an offence. I am come to denounce the Manageress of the Hotel des Etrangers, in the Rue Cambon, of erasing the names of two English ladies named Fraser from her register."

His face was not pretty to look upon. He appeared to be biting his lips to keep the words in. I thought for a moment that he was going to shout for his myrmidons to drop me down an oubliette.

"No matter, Monsieur," I said lightly. "I am quite satisfied," and then as I was going out I dropped these words over my shoulder:

"For a newspaper like *The Times* I am more than satisfied. 'Bubonic Plague in Paris. The Eve of the Great Exhibition.' It will be a great sensation, Monsieur. Good day!"

I returned to my hotel, for now, I felt sure, I had nothing to do but to wait. I think that the telephone had been busy; the Manageress's eyes scorched my face once but did not linger on it. I knew what she was feeling, for I had myself allowed my eyes to rest upon the puff-adder at the Zoo. But I was easy and unconcerned as that unamiable reptile. Having left my card with the Police Commissary I told the porter that I expected a visitor and went into the salon to wait. Nor was I kept waiting long. The Manageress herself announced my visitor—M. Henri Bonchamps, of the Ministry of the Interior; a very diplomatic gentleman in silk hat and frock coat, brimming over with nervous amiability.

"Mr. Meddleston-Jones? Ah! Monsieur, I am enchanted to make your acquaintance." He looked at the retreating form of the

Manageress and assured himself that the door was shut behind her. I put a chair for him and he sat down. "I call upon you at the desire of the Minister himself. His Excellency would have come in person, but unfortunately he has been summoned to the Elysée and he felt that the business was not one that brooked delay. His Excellency has been shocked at learning only this morning that some of his subordinates have been guilty of proceedings that he condemns in the strongest manner. It appears that a poor lady, a compatriot of yours, Monsieur, arrived in Paris with her daughter a day or two ago. She complained of illness, a doctor was called in; he discovered her to be suffering from bubonic plague contracted, no doubt, in Naples, whence she had come. The doctor notified the police and thus far no exception can be taken. But at this point their zeal ran away with them. They ought, of course, to have informed the lady's daughter and the British Consul, but instead of this they began an elaborate course of concealment. The daughter was sent away on some pretext and during her absence the poor lady was removed to a hospital, where, unfortunately, she died the same night. They then appear to have deliberately deceived the daughter by pretending that the incident had not occurred. This was entirely indefensible and the Minister is taking very serious measures with all the officials and others concerned.

"You are, no doubt, a relation of the poor lady, Monsieur,—a relation closely connected with the Press in England. In tendering His Excellency's apologies, I am desired to say that the lady was reverently interred in the Pére La Chaise cemetery. I have with me the certificate and the title to the grave which His Excellency begs you to accept on behalf of the lady's family. If there is anything else that you think should be done, Monsieur, you have only to suggest it. There is one request, one hope, I should say, that His Excellency desires to express. He does hope, he does most earnestly hope, that if possible no mention should be made in any newspaper of this most unfortunate occurrence. A mention of bubonic plague, for example, on the very eve of a Great Exhibition, would be deplored by us all—deplored even by your own compatriots in Paris. May I reassure His Excellency on this point?"

The gentleman had discharged his task with delicacy and skill, but I was not at all convinced that the Minister's indignation and regret had not made its appearance at the moment when he

thought he had been found out. I had the documentary evidence, the case was cleared up; I had only to tell the Consul and return to London.

My first visit was to Vicarage Gate, where I broke the news to the Aunt and left her to tell Miss Fraser. She was very strongly against any publicity and on this occasion I resolved to tell Mr. Pepper something less than the truth. I felt that in all innocence he might happen to mention the case in the hearing of his Press agent and these journalists are so dreadfully indiscreet.

I presented myself at the office without saying a word.

"Well," said Mr. Pepper, "what was Paris like?"

"Cool and a little showery," I replied.

"Ah!"—a pause—"did you hear anything about the Fraser case?"

"Yes," I said, "you were right, Mr. Pepper, as you generally are, I believe that the furniture in the room was changed while Miss Fraser was out."

"Under threats from the Mafia?" He was beginning to crow.

"Under a threat of some sort emanating from Naples, Mr. Pepper—at least, that is what I think. But the poor lady is dead—so the police believe—and the British Consul desires that for the present everything should be left to him. Any publicity at this point would ruin everything."

"Ah, well. They will never get the guilty people. You'll see."

"I think you are right in that too, Mr. Pepper."

Henry Wade

DUELLO

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"Like the good old times, isn't it?—All for the love of a lady."

The speaker was a uniformed police-superintendent, ponderous in build and patriarchal in manner. His companion was a considerably younger man in plain clothes, whose firm mouth and steady grey eyes were becoming only too well known to the underworld—Detective-Inspector Poole, of the C.I.D. The two men were standing on a stretch of sodden grass—a clearing in

a wood; at their feet lay two other men, both in evening clothes —short coat, black tie, one wearing a white waistcoat, one a black —and both dead. In the right hand of each was clasped a small automatic pistol and each white shirt-front was saturated with a dark smear of blood.

"Lady or money, Superintendent. Hardly politics in these days, I'm afraid. Who found them?"

"Sergeant Robins, here. A farm labourer reported at Broxbourne this morning that there was an empty car with its lights on standing outside Cowheath Wood—this wood; Robins jumped on a bike and came along, found the car, did a bit of exploring into the wood and came across these chaps. Like a sensible fellow he got straight back to his station and telephoned for me—Enfield, my headquarters are; I came along with the doctor, had a look—and went off myself and telephoned to the Yard—and here you are. Dr. Vammer just confirmed fact of death—then I sent him away and said we'd have him back later."

Poole stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"You had some reason for calling in the C.I.D., Superintendent. On the face of it, it's a job you could have tackled yourself."

Superintendent Cox chuckled.

"Yes, Mr. Poole," he said. "I had a reason; you'll probably spot it for yourself when you've had a look round."

Poole nodded.

"If it's not a straightforward case," he said, "footprints are going to be important—can you tell me how much the ground's been disturbed?"

"I think so. Robins showed me exactly the line he'd followed, in and out—he didn't come closer than ten paces or so—said he knew a stiff when he saw one. The doctor and I followed in his footsteps—as you and I have just done; of course we came right up but we didn't trample round—I think you'll find their footmarks quite distinct from ours. Now you go ahead."

For a minute or so Poole continued to gaze down at the bodies of the two duellists—as apparently they were. One was a middle-aged man of fair size—perhaps five feet ten, but not heavily built. The other was younger and smaller, of rather dapper type, but possessed—Poole thought—of an excellent pair of shoulders. He lay on his side, with one arm flung out behind him—the right arm, in the hand of which was clasped the .38 Colt. Glancing at his feet, with a view to identifying footprints, the detective saw that they were small, even for his size, and that the evening shoes

had sharply pointed toes. The older man's feet were larger, and the shoes squarer; there should be no difficulty in distinguishing the two footprints, though there was probably no importance in them.

"Square Toes" also lay on his side, his knees slightly drawn up, one ankle turning inwards in a curiously unnatural manner. His hand, also, clasped a .38 Colt; it seemed as if the two men must have fired simultaneously, at very close range, though not so close as to leave powder marking on the linen shirt-fronts. It was an intriguing affair; such a thing as a duel was almost unheard of in these days and in this case it seemed as if the men had been bent upon killing each other, without thought of one surviving.

"Know who they are, sir?"

Superintendent Cox drew some papers from his pocket.

"One comes from Cheshunt—this one—George Horne; here's his card. The other hadn't a card but he had some letters, addressed to Julian de Lange, Cadorna Mansions, Putney. I don't know anything about either of them, though Cheshunt's in my division; enquiries being made now about Horne."

"Right, sir. I'll telephone to the Yard to look up de Lange. Odd position this chap Horne's in—that ankle, I mean."

Poole took hold of the legs of the older man and tried to straighten them, but they were quite immovable. De Iange's legs were nearly straight but they also were quite stiff.

"Doctor say anything about time of death, sir?"

"He put it between twelve and three; Horne's *rigor* was a bit more advanced, but he's an older man—arteries harder."

With considerable difficulty the detective disengaged the Colt from Horne's hand, drew out the magazine, extracted the round from the chamber, and looked down the barrel.

"The worst of these automatics is that it's so jolly difficult to tell how many rounds have been fired," he said. "The good old-fashioned revolver kept its spent cartridge in the cylinder—you only had to count. These things spit them out as they re-load and you have to hunt on the ground—you can never be sure if you've found all there are. Are you an expert on guns, sir? Can you tell by the fouling of the barrel how many shots have been fired?"

Superintendent Cox shook his head.

"I can't, and I doubt if any one else can—within a round. There's not much fouling in this, but I can't guarantee that only

one shot's been fired. What's the doubt? They could hardly have missed each other at this range."

Poole smiled.

"Scotland Yard's got to justify your calling it in, sir," he said.

A similar examination was made of de Lange's Colt, with equally indeterminate result.

"I'll just go over these footprints before I look for the shell," said Poole.

Although the ground was soft enough to take a good impression wherever the earth was exposed, there was so much grass that no clear line of tracks could be distinguished. In the clearing where the bodies lay Poole had the greatest difficulty in picking out any distinct footprints, but nearer the edge of the wood—under the trees—there was no grass, only moss with many bare patches of earth. Here—in a line between the bodies and the deserted car—were several clearly defined footprints which Poole, a shoe from each victim in his hands, had no difficulty in identifying as those of the dead men. "Pointed Toes"—de Lange—gave particularly clear marks, except where, in one or two places, "Square Toes" were partially superimposed upon them.

The detective spent a considerable time over these footprints; finally, he called to the Superintendent, who was still standing by the bodies.

"Which of those men would you say was the heavier, sir?"

Mr. Cox studied the bodies with a practised eye.

"Horne, I should say; he's inches taller. De Lange has got big shoulders, of course—may have the bigger bones."

"There's no doubt about it from these tracks; de Lange is distinctly the heavier—his impressions are definitely deeper than Horne's."

He stood for a while in silence, studying the tracks at his feet.

"It's a funny thing, sir," he said. "These men came here with the obvious intention of killing each other—look at the range they fired at, with both pistols loaded—and yet one wasn't afraid of being murdered by the other. These tracks show that de Lange walked in front, and Horne followed behind him—could easily have shot him in the back. Psychology's an odd thing. Well, sir; I suppose we must go to Cheshunt now; I'll just have a hunt round for those shells. The bodies can go off to the doctor; will you ask him to weigh them, sir, and let me know at the Cheshunt station."

A thorough search of the ground round the bodies produced,

as was to be expected, two spent cartridge-cases. Although the grass was fairly long, Poole felt prety sure that there were no more. He next turned his attention to the car; it was a 12 h.p. Yorrick saloon, fairly new—its upholstery clean and yielding no clue of any sort. Poole got leave to borrow it and also Sergt. Robins; taking leave of the Superintendent he drove off towards Cheshunt.

Having learnt from the local police that Mr. George Horne was a married man, with no children, living in a small house called Five Oaks, about half a mile west of the town, Poole decided to call upon the Vicar, with the double object of getting him to break the news to the widow and of learning any local gossip.

Rev. James Partacle was an elderly man with an obviously sympathetic nature. He was genuinely distressed by the news brought by the detective and at once bustled off on his painful errand, murmuring "Poor girl; poor young girl." Mrs. Partacle, to whom the Vicar referred Poole for information, was perhaps more worldly than her husband; she was deeply intrigued by the detective's news and was able and willing to throw considerable illumination upon it.

The Hornes, it appeared, had come to Five Oaks soon after their marriage four years previously. For a time they appeared a happy and attached couple, but as time went on it became evident that Quirril Horne, a pretty and excitable woman at least ten years younger than her husband, was finding life on the outskirts of a London suburb extremely dull. For a time this difficulty was met by her husband taking her two or three nights a week to theatres and night clubs in London, but this life soon began to tell upon a hard-worked City man and gradually he became more reluctant to take her, more fretful when he did. There was nothing unusual in the situation—it was a commonplace of post-war life—but none the less a tragedy.

Inevitably as her husband cooled off Mrs. Horne began to look for other cavaliers; she had no difficulty in finding them. There had been no actual scandal but there was "talk"; a London "gigolo" was mentioned. There were no children to draw the couple together; they were drifting (so Mrs. Partacle) to—this.

When the Vicar returned, Poole learnt that Mrs. Horne, who had been "desperately worried" at her husband's absence was now "prostrated with grief." The Vicar trusted that it would not be necessary to intrude upon her sorrow; Poole gave a non-committal reply, thanked Mr. and Mrs. Partacle for their help,

and drove straight to Five Oaks. Leaving Sergt. Robins in the car outside the drive gate, Poole walked towards the house. The drive, some fifty yards long, was of new, well-kept gravel and showed clearly the single track of a car, the tyres being of the same make as those borne by the Yorrick. From the Cheshunt police Poole had discovered that there had been heavy rain on the previous night from about 9–11 p.m.—probably the car had gone out after eleven and had come in (if it had been out at all that day) before nine.

A red-eyed maid admitted Poole, informed him that Mrs. Horne was in the drawing-room and added that she was in a "terrible state, crying her head off." The detective was suitably impressed and asked for a few words with his informant in the kitchen. As they passed down the passage the girl jerked her thumb at a door; Poole paused for a moment and heard the sound of deep sobbing within—it was indeed a severe attack that should last half an hour after the breaking of the news by the kindly Vicar.

In the kitchen Poole learnt that the cook, who ordinarily lived in the house, was away till midday, having been given leave to attend her sister's wedding in Devonshire on the previous day. Ethel herself—the house-parlourmaid—did not sleep in the house, but with her parents in Cheshunt. She had given Mr. Horne his (cold) supper at 7.45 p.m. the previous evening—Mrs. Horne was in London and not returning till late—and, after washing up and turning down the beds, had left the house at about 10 p.m. There was, therefore (Poole observed), no independent witness of anything that might have occurred in the house after that hour. Ethel certainly did not know that Mr. Horne was expecting anyone that evening, though of course he may have come after she left. Mr. Horne always dressed for dinner, whether he was alone or not.

Having learnt so much, Poole thought he had kept Mrs. Horne, who had probably heard the front door bell ring, waiting long enough. Ethel was persuaded—against her will—to tap at the drawing-room door and announce him.

Mrs. Horne, dressed in a fawn skirt and a striped jumper, was lying on a sofa, an embroidered shawl over her legs. She did not attempt to rise when Poole entered, but greeted him with the shadow of a smile and a gesture towards a chair. Her eyes were red, but her colour was high, and she gave the detective the impression of being hysterical rather than prostrated with grief.

Poole made the usual apology for intrusion, followed by the stock question as to when she had seen her husband last.

Quirril Horne put a lace handkerchief to her mouth and stared at the detective with wide-open eyes; she seemed to be stifling her emotion.

"Yesterday morning—when he went to catch—(sob)—his train. I went up—in the afternoon—to shop—I—never—saw him again —oh my God." She turned on her side, buried her face in her arm, and sobbed wildly.

Poole allowed a minute to pass.

"And when did you see Mr. de Lange last?" he asked quietly.

The sobs ceased abruptly. Slowly Quirril lifted her head and looked at the detective, her eyes large with innocent surprise.

"De Lange?" she said. "Who's he?"

"The man who was found dead beside your husband. I thought perhaps he was a—an acquaintance of yours."

Mrs. Horne sat bolt upright, her eyes flashing.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "How dare you? What are you suggesting? Oh how monstrous!"

"I have suggested nothing, madam; I only asked. . . ."

"Oh, but you did! You think he is my lover—that my husband killed him—that they fought a duel for me. Oh, what shall I do? How cruel! How terrible!"

There was no longer any anger in Mrs. Horne's eyes, but there was a sparkle of something else—was it excitement? . . . Suddenly it dawned upon Poole that Mr. Partacle's "poor young girl" was intensely enjoying the scene!

The detective's manner changed at once. He rose to his feet; when he spoke, his voice was cold and incisive.

"Mrs. Horne, it is my duty to warn you of your position. In the eyes of the law murder has been committed; if you, being aware of the circumstances, conceal your knowledge from the police, you are rendering yourself liable to be charged as an accessory either before or after the fact. It is perfectly easy for the police to find out whether or not you knew Mr. de Lange and when you were last with him; I strongly advise you to be absolutely frank with me."

Poole realised that he was talking like a magazine detective but he felt sure that that was the only kind of talk that Mrs. Horne would appreciate. Certainly it had the desired effect; Quirril altered her pose. Dropping her voice into a low and earnest key she made what she called her "confession." Julian de Lange had

been her lover. Her husband began to suspect their "guilty passion" (sic) and last night Julian—with whom she had been dining and dancing in town—had insisted on coming down with her and having it out with George. She herself had retired to her bedroom ("What else could I do, Inspector? My position was terrible!") and for half an hour had listened to loud and angry voices from downstairs. Then the front-door had slammed, she heard the garage doors pulled back and the car being started up and driven away. She could not imagine what had happened—had her husband driven away and left her? Or had he merely driven his rival to the station to catch a workman's train. ("An anti-climax that you'd have hated," thought Poole.)

"I lay awake all night," Quirril concluded, "racking my brains, torturing myself with suspense. Oh, it was horrible, horrible! And then this morning—Mr. Partacle coming—to hear that they were both dead—that they had killed each other for me—what my feelings have been—my remorse—my guilty remorse!"

Tears, sobs, heaving shoulders—all the reactions familiar to the devotee of the cinema. The woman was evidently quite incapable of genuine feeling—of appreciating the true horror of her position.

Utterly disgusted, Poole decided to cut the "scene"; he would probably have to return to it, but he wanted fresh air—morally as well as physically. There were one or two points to be cleared up before he could decide whether the case was as straightforward as it appeared or whether the curious doubt that had come into his mind was based upon solid foundations. Rejoining Sergt. Robins, he drove the dead man's car back to Cheshunt Police Station; the sergeant in charge at once handed him a message from the doctor who was examining the bodies. Both men had died of gunshot wounds inflicted some time between midnight and 3 a.m. There was nothing to show whether the wounds were self-inflicted or not; the weight of Horne was 12st. 12ozs., and of de Lange 11st. 8ozs.

Poole felt his interest, deadened as it had been by his disgust at Mrs. Horne's behaviour, quicken into active life. Horne was more than a stone heavier than his rival—and yet his footprints were appreciably less deep and clear than those of de Lange!

For twenty minutes Poole sat, wrapt in thought; by the end of that time he had worked out a theory that might cover the known facts. Driving the Hornes' Yorrick into the yard at the back of the police-station, he went over it again with a magnifying glass,

but without discovering anything either to confirm or disprove his theory. A reference to the Register of Firearms records was more enlightening and he drove back to Five Oaks with a grim tightening of his mouth.

Making his way this time to the back door, where he would not have to pass the drawing-room window, the detective gently knocked and was admitted by a flustered Ethel.

"Your master's dressing-room," he said; "can you show it me without letting Mrs. Horne know?"

Ethel goggled but she led the way up a miniature back stairs in silence. The dressing-room was small but well-furnished—a good mahogany wardrobe, a bow-fronted chest of drawers, and a boot-cupboard. It was to the latter that Poole turned his attention; opening the door he pulled out seven pairs of shoes and placed them side by side in a row on the floor—two pairs of black, one of brown, golf shoes, tennis shoes, old evening shoes and red slippers; with the exception of the latter they were all evidently built from the same last. Drawing from the small attaché case that he carried the evening shoe that he had removed from the dead man's foot for identifying footprints, he compared it carefully with the shoes in front of him; without a shadow of doubt they were also made from the same last.

"How many pairs has he got altogether?" asked Poole in a low voice. "There'll be another pair of day shoes perhaps?"

Ethel was looking at the display with a puzzled expression. "That's a funny thing," she said. "I can't call to mind . . . oh, well, I suppose I did—I've been that flustered to-day."

"What can't you remember?" asked Poole sharply.

"Cleaning them London shoes."

"Do you mean the ones he was wearing when he came back from London yesterday? Probably they're still downstairs."

"Not they; he didn't have but two pairs. It's one of them two," said Ethel, whose grammar was not her strong point.

"You usually clean them; when?"

"Not till latish as a rule—morning I mean. Master, he'd take 'em off of an evening of course and I'd take 'em down to the pantry. But he always put on another pair and another suit come the morning—rested the mollycoddles or something, he said. I usen't as a rule to brush till after I'd cleared breakfast."

"Had you cleared breakfast when I came this morning?"

"No I hadn't—not to say properly, I mean. One or two things

I'd brought into the pantry, but I was that flustered-like, what with master not being back and her that jumpy and excited. . . ."

"Then when did you clean the shoes?"

"I didn't. Leastways I s'pose I must 'a done. But I don't know when—I don't recollect doing it."

Poole seized the two pairs of black shoes.

"Which pair was he wearing yesterday?" he asked.

The question seemed unreasonable, so twin were the two parts, but Ethel knew her job better than her quantities. She looked carefully at the pairs, then touched the ones in Poole's left hand.

"Them. That tag's gone—I noticed it yesterday morning."

"Look at them carefully—can you tell me whether you cleaned them or not?"

"Well, look at them? They're clean enough, ain't they?" Ethel's voice had a tang of indignation.

"I mean did *you* clean them?"

The girl stared at him, looked at the shoes again, turned them over—and straightened herself abruptly. "That I didn't—they ain't black under the arches—master was dead on that—look 'ere." She seized the other pair and, turning both over, displayed the difference to Poole.

The detective rose slowly to his feet.

"The suit?" he said.

Ethel half turned towards the wardrobe, but stopped.

"I'll take my Davy it was still in the pantry when you come just now," she said.

"Get it," he returned, and to himself, "Not likely to be that one."

While the girl was away he hunted through the suits in the wardrobe but evidently found nothing that interested him. Nor did the suit of conventional London clothes brought by Ethel afford any enlightenment. Returning to the shoes he examined them carefully with a pocket magnifying glass and this time appeared satisfied with what he saw.

"That's enough to go on," he muttered.

Dismissing Ethel, he quietly descended the front stairs and, after listening for a moment at the drawing-room door, walked straight in. To his surprise, he found Mrs. Horne still lying on the sofa, her legs covered with the embroidered shawl. He had not expected that a woman of her temperament would hold that pose so long. Without apology for his intrusion he came straight to the point.

"Would you mind telling me who looks after your husband's clothes, madam?" he asked.

Quirril stared at him in evident surprise.

"Why, Ethel, of course—the parlourmaid," she replied after a pause.

"Nobody else?"

"No. Why should they?"

"You don't yourself do so?"

"Certainly not—I make him stockings sometimes, that's all."

"You don't, for example, ever clean his shoes?"

For the first time Poole thought he saw genuine emotion in the girl's face—the emotion of fear.

She did not answer, but stared at him with hard eyes—a look which he returned. Suddenly, as he watched her, there came to him a possible explanation of her attitude—her physical attitude.

"Will you come with me and help me go through the things in his dressing-room?" he asked.

There was no mistaking the look on her face now.

"Why do you want to do that?" she asked harshly. "Can't you leave me alone—the very day that my husband dies!"

Poole rose to his feet.

"It's my duty to go through his things—I must do it now," he said.

She sat upright and seemed about to follow him, but checked herself and sank back on her cushions, putting her hand to her eyes.

"I feel so ill," she said, weakly. "I can't do it—do fetch a doctor or someone."

"I'm going now," the detective replied, inexorably, moving towards the door. But Quirril did not move and as he closed the door behind him Poole realised that his first stratagem had failed. Going to the kitchen, he gave some instructions to Ethel and slipped out into the garden. Making his way carefully to the drawing-room window he crouched down, with his head just below the sill. There was a minute's pause and the front door banged. Poole slowly raised his head till he could see into the room. Quirril Horne was sitting bolt upright on the safe, staring at the door—her back was almost to him, so that he could not read the expression on her face, though he guessed it accurately enough. Again a pause and, unexpectedly, the door banged again. Poole saw his prey stiffen. Pause, and again a bang. Pause, bang.

Pause, bang. Pause, bang. It was more than any nerves, however sound—and Quirril's surely were not that—could stand. Swinging her feet to the floor, she sprang up and took three quick steps towards the door, then staggered and came to an abrupt stop. For a moment she stood in the centre of the room, then turned and limped slowly back to the sofa. Poole could see her face now —on it was deeply engraved pain and misery. Pity for the first time stirred in his heart, mingling with the triumph that he felt at this complete confirmation of his guess.

Going back into the house, he stopped Ethel's door-banging activities and obtained from her the further information that he required. Then, with a rather heavy heart, he returned to the drawing-room.

"Mrs. Horne," he said. "I may have to take you into custody on a charge of being concerned in the murder of either your husband or Mr. de Lange. I am going to ask you some questions but I must warn you that what you answer may be used as evidence and that you are not obliged to answer if you do not want to."

As he spoke he saw, to his intense astonishment, Quirril's expression change from misery to alertness, from alertness to excitement—almost pleasure. The dramatic value of the situation was outweighing her personal fears!

"Ask your questions," she exclaimed. "I will decide whether to answer them when I hear them."

"Were you dancing with Mr. de Lange in London last night?"

"You know I was—I told you. There's no crime in that."

"Why did you stop?"

Quirril stared at him.

"Why? Because we'd had enough I suppose—no, it was because Julian wanted to come down here and have it out with George—I told you that too."

"No other reason?"

"No—what do you mean?"

Poole leant forward.

"You didn't stop because you had rubbed the skin off your heels so badly that you couldn't walk three steps across a room?" he asked.

Slowly the colour ebbed out of the girl's face—fear again pushing the "dramatic" into the background.

"I put it to you," Poole followed up, "that you rubbed the

skin off your heels when you walked back from Cowheath Wood in your husband's shoes last night. Is that so?"

The girl buried her face in her hands and remained so, motionless, while the detective's calm, inexorable voice continued.

"In the Firearms Register of this district, Mrs. Horne, your husband is registered as holding a .38 Colt automatic."

A pause, but Quirril did not move.

"You are also registered as holding a similar automatic, Mrs. Horne. These two weapons bear the numbers of, and in fact are, the two that were found in the hands of the dead men this morning. I put it to you that you at least knew. . . ."

Quirril flung up her head, her face once more flushed, her eyes sparkling.

"Yes, I knew!" she cried. "And much more than that! You're a clever man, inspector; you'll find it all out in time. I'll tell you—no, no, don't stop me; I know what I'm doing. I'll tell you now—I may not if you take me to the police-station. I told you that Julian wanted to have it out with George—that wasn't true; he didn't—it was the last thing he wanted. I got him down here, pretending George was away from home. You should have seen their faces when they met in this room! George simply blew up and Julian lost his temper too—it was terrific!"

The girl's eyes flashed with enjoyment of the recollection.

"I thought they'd fight, but instead of that they cooled off—they hadn't either of them got the guts. I don't mean they made it up—anything but—but they became coldly hating instead of hotly, as I wanted. George actually offered to drive Julian to the station, because it was raining! While he was gone for the car, I slipped my gun into Julian's hand and told him to shoot George—we could easily arrange it to look like suicide. He wouldn't—wanted to, but funked it—pushed the gun back at me. When George came back into the room I walked up to him and shot him myself through the heart.

"There was no one else in the house and not another house within earshot. I mopped up what little blood had got on to the carpet and filled Julian up with whisky—and a plan. I put on an old pair of George's flannel trousers and the shoes he'd been wearing and my own mac and a cap. I pretended it was because I should be less noticeable as a man than as a woman, but really of course it was to make footprints like George's—Julian was too much of a fool to think of them.

"The car was already at the door—it had stopped raining.

We drove to Cowheath Wood and Julian carried George to that clearing—I followed. We had put the gun into George's hand at once—after wiping off my finger-prints—and we arranged him (as Julian thought) to look like suicide. Then when Julian straightened up I shot him through the heart in exactly the same way with George's gun, that I'd got out of his desk—and there it was—a duel!

"Of course, I had to kill Julian. I'd have been in his power for ever if I hadn't—he was quite capable of blackmail. I killed George because I couldn't stand him any longer—and because—because—oh, you wouldn't understand that."

The look in Quirril's eyes as she spoke was certainly a complex one—it would have needed, Poole thought, an alienist to interpret it fully.

"The grass was long in the clearing and down a ride that crossed the wood—I knew it well; we often used to picnic there. I felt sure my footprints wouldn't show on it if I shuffled along and that you would only look at the two tracks—George's and Julian's you would think, leading from the car to the bodies. I don't know what made you suspect me."

She paused interrogatively, but as Poole remained silent, continued:

"I walked home but, though it was only two miles George's awful shoes rubbed the most ghastly places on my heels. I didn't notice—I was too excited—till the damage was done. I struggled home, burnt the trousers in the hot water furnace, cleaned George's shoes, and went to bed. When I woke up my feet were awful. I didn't dare stay in bed—I knew I should be made to get up and I couldn't let anyone see me walk into a room—so I dressed and lay on the sofa. I don't know how you spotted . . . Good God, Julian!"

Poole, who had been watching the girl's face, saw it suddenly stiffen into a look of terror, her gaze fixed over his shoulder toward the door. He spun round, caught by the age-old and never-failing trick, and in that moment a revolver crashed.

. . . . . .

"That's a type that I don't understand," said Superintendent Cox, gazing down at the dead woman. Poole had repeated to him Quirril's extraordinary story and still more extraordinary manner.

"War-time adolescene and post-war demoralisation," said

Poole. "I've seen them in London—night-clubs full of them—though they don't generally go such lengths. Lot of good qualities in her too—brains and pluck—up to the eyes in pluck."

"I wonder there wasn't any blood in the car," said the matter-of-fact Superintendent.

"She was too sharp for that, sir—wrapped him up in something I expect, and burnt it like the trousers. I looked for it, of course."

"What put you on to it, Poole—that it wasn't what it looked?"

"Well, I knew you'd seen something, sir, or you wouldn't have called in the Yard. So I didn't take things for granted. Horne's ankle was the first thing—it was bent over. The fall couldn't have done that, and if it was permanent, it would have shown in the footprints, which were straight enough. It simply followed that he couldn't have made them. The bent ankle, too, suggested a cramped position, for a stiffening body in the car. Then there was the 'rigor.' The doctor said Horne's was more advanced than de Lange's—suggested age as the cause; but Horne wasn't old or decrepit—a much simpler explanation was that he died earlier than de Lange did. Then again, those footprints—de Lange's—the lighter man's—more deeply marked than Horne's—why? Than Horne's? But Horne hadn't made them—then who had? They were made with his shoes, without a shadow of doubt. Who had access to his shoes? His wife.

"Then there was Mrs. Partacle's account of the Hornes; Mrs. Horne's own extraoardinary manner and what she called her 'confession'—finally, the Firearms Register, showing her as the owner of one of the automatics. I was a damn fool, though, to forget that it showed him as holding a service revolver as well as the Colt; I ought to have searched for it—she'd got it under the cushions on the sofa all the time I suppose."

There was silence for a moment, as the two men looked down at the still form, the shattered head now veiled by Poole's silk handkerchief.

The younger man was the first to speak.

"Will you tell me, sir, what made you think it wasn't straight?" Superintendent Cox chuckled.

"People don't fight duels nowadays," he said. "And besides, why were de Lange's shoes limed with clay but Horne's had only respectable drive gravel on them?"

Victor L. Whitechurch

HOW THE CAPTAIN TRACKED A GERMAN SPY

Reprinted from *The Adventures of Captain Ivan Koravitch,* by permission of the author.

Captain Ivan Koravitch had invited two English friends, whom he had known before the Great War, to dine with him in his rooms. He was in a particularly happy frame of mind that evening, for, somehow or other, he had managed to procure a bottle of vodka. His friends, after tasting it, preferred their coffee without the assistance of stimulants, but the captain, disclaiming a liqueur-glass, filled a small claret tumbler more than once with the fiery spirit. Before him on the table lay a box of his inevitable Russian cigarettes, brown, and of very small size. His eyes sparkled, and his gestures were quick and descriptive as he talked. He always was a talker at ordinary times, but vodka loosened his tongue still more.

Something had been said on the subject of espionage. One of the Englishmen remarked—as Englishmen will remark in times of peace—that the stories of espionage were much exaggerated; that while it might be possible—and *was*—to procure bits of valuable information, it was scarcely probable that complete epitomes of the armaments and defences of a nation could be compiled.

Captain Ivan Koravitch, elbows on table, placed his right forefinger on the side of his nose. His face took on that sly and cunning smile that generally heralded a relation of facts or theories worth hearing. Then he exclaimed—

"You think so? Ah—well, it does not matter now. I will show you something perhaps you have never seen before—there are few who have seen it. Wait!"

He sprang to his feet, drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, and walked quickly across the room. Standing by the wall was a box clamped with metal. He threw himself on his knees, unlocked the box, and began to rummage among the contents. The other two men, as they smoked, saw him take from it a grey tunic, the flash of a row of medals, as, for a moment, he opened a case, a Mauser pistol, an old haversack, and one or two other articles. Having at length found what he wanted, he bundled

the other things back into the box, and returned with four small but bulky volumes, which he placed on the table. He lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Now, see! I do not mind showing you these to-day. They are no longer of use. Besides"—and he gave a deep sigh and shook his head sadly—"I shall not betray my Government. Alas! my friends, the Government in Russia to-day . . . but I will not speak of it—I—who am now an exile. Bah!" and there was confusion to all Soviet Governments in his eyes as he tossed down the vodka.

"Well, then, behold! Yes, I know. These three are printed in Russian, and you cannot read them—but the pictures—look—an infantry soldier of the 38th Regiment—his uniform—even a diagram of his buttons—his rifle—three plates—all the mechanism —his bayonet—these figures are their weights. Turn over—so! —a field-gun showing the positions of its crew in action—every detail—splendid!

"But, regard now this fourth book. Printed in German, yes! Do you see? It is your own army, before the war, that is described. Here are pictures of your Grenadier Guards, their strength, their equipment—everything. And here—a diagram of a machine-gun. Yes—it is full of interesting details.

"What are they and how did they come into my possession, you ask? Br-r-r-r," and he shrugged his shoulders. "The three books in Russian were compiled by our military intelligence department. They are an epitome of the German army. Ah, of *course,* they are spy books. I was authorised to possess them. Had they been found on me when I was in Germany before the war, it would have meant ten years in a fortress. The other book? Ah, my friends, that is a story. I am pleased at the way by which I came by him. Splendid!"

He refilled his glass with vodka, took another cigarette, lighted it, blew out a volume of smoke, laughed a low little laugh, and went on——

"You have often wondered what I was doing in England the year before the Great War broke out; is it not so? *Me!* An officer in the Imperial Russian Army, idling my time in your country! You remember I took a leetle cottage in a village. I shoot a leetle with my gun. I got to know the village priest and the farmers—they were all very kind to the poor ignorant foreigner. The priest, he invited me to dine with him, and the farmers invited me to see pigs killed or to play cards with them.

Splendid! Sometimes I find the country life very dull, and then I ran away for two—three weeks, and the people said, 'Captain Koravitch has gone to London to enjoy himself' but"—and the sly look came into his face as again he put his finger to the side of his nose—"I did not always go to London, and I did not always enjoy myself. For I was doing some strange work in your country. I was a spy!

"No! You need not frown and look so cross. I was not here to do you any harm. Listen! I was acting in the secret service of my Government, it is true. But I was not here to make plans of your fortifications or to find out about the guns you put on your ships, or, in truth, to trouble myself about your country at all. My business was with your enemies. For they were your enemies long before the war. Have you not a proverb which says, 'Set a thief to arrest a thief'? I was sent to spy on German spies in England!

"You wonder why! Oh, it was very simple. At the time you would have refused to understand, and would have laughed—most of you Englishmen—if I had spoken of spies at all. That was one reason. England was a very safe place for spies to remain at liberty and to arrange their rendezvous. And not all of them were seeking to find out about your country. There were others who found it more easy to give in to some agent in England reports about other countries than to take them direct to Germany. Why, I will show you.

"Our frontier stations and seaports were carefully watched. It would have been risky, let us say, for a German spy to carry a document from Moscow to Berlin by rail. But not so difficult for a German sailor on an English tramp steamer to convey it from Odessa to London. And *then*—oh, my friends, you were blind! It was *very* easy to transmit secretly from England direct to Germany. Not much risk. Yes! Also with France. There were many, many German spies in France. And it was often more safe for them to communicate with Berlin by crossing the Channel first to England. The Channel boats, say you, were watched? Pouf! There were other methods. But, do not hurry me. *Please!*

"Now you will have seen something of my secret work. You will also remember that France was our friend. It is wise to obtain information about one's friends as well as about one's enemies. Therefore you will see it was not unimportant to watch in more directions than one. Yes?

"Now I will be like one of your English policemen. I have heard them give evidence in a court of law. A big fat man in

blue goes into the witness-box with his helmet under his arm. So!"

Springing to his feet, he stuck out his chest, puffed his cheeks, and assumed a very solemn look.

"And he begins with the words, 'From information received.' And neither the judge nor the advocate asks him how he received the information. You, my friends, must now be the judge and the advocate. You must not ask me how I received the information. But it was this," and he sat down once more.

"A very clever agent of Germany, Otto Schuster, was known to be in Paris. Also it was suspected that he had obtained from Russia a plan of the mechanism of a new quick-firing field-gun with which our artillery were experimenting. And I was warned to take notice if Otto Schuster came to England. While he was in Paris it was not my business, but I had to take precautions. There were men I knew who could help me—a leetle French chef in a hotel in Newhaven, a barber of mine own country—who passed as a Frenchman—at Dover, and a man who kept a music-shop at Folkestone, each of them, you will observe, situated on one of the three main routes to Paris. It was necessary for me to see them all personally, so I took one of my leetle holidays. I dined with the priest the night before I went away, and he ask if I am going to London to make myself amusements. I tell him no; this August weather is so hot I shall spend a few days on the coast, and take off my boots and socks and wash my feet in the sea. Splendid!

"It took me but an hour to do my business at Newhaven. From there I take the train to Folkestone. Ah, your English railways! I am hardly seated at Newhaven before we arrive in Lewes. 'All change here!' and I get out and wait. Into another train. Presently, at Hastings, it will be again 'All change here.' Also at Ashford again, 'All change.' You English love your changes: your changes of Government—your changes of fashion—your changes of air (which is a very funnee expression, for air is always of the same chemical constituents)—your changes of trains. Splendid! Also you love many railway tickets. Often in your leetle island in a leetle journey you have to take two—three—tickets. So at Newhaven they would not give me a ticket farther than Hastings. Change your trains. Change your tickets! It is sometimes very puzzling.

"A leetle before one arrives at Hastings there is—what do you call it where two railway lines intermingle to make one? So! A

junction. Yes! It is a junction with a very funnee name—I saw him painted on the box of signals, where the lines intersect themselves—'Bo-peep Junction!' Is it where the leetle shepherdess of that name about whom you have a historical memory in a song lived, do you think? There is a station just before one arrives at this junction, and we had stopped there. So we were going very slowly. On the other line a train from London, which was late, was drawn up waiting till we had passed, so that it should come after us instead of before.

"There was a man looking out of a window in this other train, and I saw his face very plainly as we went by. Seldom do I forget in my memory a countenance which I have had reason to recollect. And I knew at once who the man was. I had seen him before, and it was my business not to forget him. Who was he? I will tell you. Previously upon a time his name was Carl Von Neglein, but for a dozen years he had been naturalised in England under the name of Charles Netherton. Oh, *very* funnee! He was a merchant in London, and he had a fine big house out in the country. And he was *very* patriotic, this Netherton. He subscribed to your hospitals, your games of cricket and football clubs. Because he was rich, your aristocracy allowed him to entertain them. And people said, 'What a *very* fine fellow! We love him so much!'

"But all the time he was a very dangerous man. I think afterwards your secret service discovered it. *We* knew it then. He was —what shall we call him?—a chief among the agents. And I said to myself, as my train entered the tunnel just beyond the junction of Bo-peep, 'Aha, my friend—what are you doing here? Perhaps instead of going on to Folkestone I will see if you have come to the coast because Otto Schuster is in Paris.'

"First it was necessary that I should make myself look more English. I will show you how."

Captain Ivan Koravitch took from his pocket a little case, and produced out of it a small mirror and a comb.

"Always I carry this," he explained, "to make my toilet. This leetle mirror and comb have been with me all through the war. Now, behold! Splendid!"

With a few quick turns of his fingers he untwisted his carefully waxed moustache, and then proceeded to comb it downwards over his lips. The effect was astonishing. The walrus hirsute appendage, as it appeared now, completely altered his face, making it look quite heavy and stupid.

"At Hastings I got out and waited for the other train. Out of it descended Mr. Charles Netherton. Like myself, he was only carrying a small bag, with a light coat over his arm. He was dressed in a grey-check patterned suit of very bad cut, and looked just like—eh, what do you call him? Yes—a tripper.

"I followed him from the station, taking care he did not notice me. He went to a large but not at all aristocratic hotel, and entered. Presently I, too, went in, took a room, and asked to have my dinner before I went upstairs to see it. So when he came down and went into the salon he saw me sitting at a leetle table drinking my soup, with a newspaper in front of me—just like a guest who had been there before he came. Splendid!

"After dinner we both walked on the promenade. I saw him read carefully a big notice by the pier. Afterwards I looked at the notice, which said that to-morrow at eleven o'clock a pleasure-steamer would travel to Boulogne. 'Three hours on shore,' and the fare included admission to the Casino. Then I began to make a guess, and I kept away from Mr. Netherton till nearly eleven o'clock the next morning. And then I followed him on to the pier, and bought a return ticket to Boulogne. He had his bag in his hand, but I had left mine at the hotel.

"During the voyage I sat in a deck-chair in a corner, and never took my eyes from the book I read. On arrival at Boulogne I had to be *very* careful, for I knew he was a clever man, this Netherton, but there was a great crowd of passengers, and it was not very difficult to watch him at a leetle distance. He walked along two or three streets, and then seated himself at a table on the pavement outside a café. The café was at the corner of the street, with two entrances, and, unnoticed by him, I entered from the other street, and found a place inside, so that I could see him through the window from behind himself.

"Ten minutes—twenty—half an hour I waited and drank beer. And at last the other came! Yes! You have guessed right. It was Otto Schuster. I recognised him as he sat down at the table next to Mr. Netherton. But neither of them took notice of the other. Oh, they were both *very* clever.

"But through the window I could *see*. Beside him on the pavement, Mr. Netherton had placed his leetle bag and had taken a newspaper from it, leaving it a leetle bit open. Presently Otto Schuster took from his pocket a small parcel covered with brown paper. He stooped to tie the laces of his boot, and as he stooped I saw him drop the parcel into the bag. In a few minutes Mr.

Netherton finished his drink, took up his bag, and walked away. And still he did not look at Schuster or say a word to him.

"*Very* good, I thought. I can do nothing more now. But tonight in the hotel I will try to get that parcel. But for the present I will make myself amusements till the boat departs. So I went to the Casino. Splendid!

"It is always the same when I play. I am never careful. And I cannot help going on while I have the money. It is a bad habit, yes! But often when we know a habit is bad, we love him all the more. My friends, when I came out of the Casino just in time to get on to the boat, I had nothing at all left in my pockets but a sixpence and a few coppers. The croupier had taken all my money. I say to myself, I do not care. When I get back to Hastings I will pawn my watch, which was of gold. It will be what you call 'all right.' Splendid!

"But it was another matter when we arrived at last in Hastings. Mr. Netherton did not go back to the hotel at all. And as I had to keep him in sight I could not go to pawn my watch. He went straight to the railway station. And as I was looking very deeply at a time-table with my back towards him, I heard him ask for a first-class ticket to Portsmouth. I looked at the list of prices of tickets. To Portsmouth, even of the third-class, it was about seven shillings, and I only had tenpence. I had been a big fool!

"But, I say, *somehow* I must follow this man and try to obtain from him that which is in his bag. The train was just about to depart. I purchased a ticket to the station at the other end of the town—West Marina—it cost only a few pence, and, at all events, it enabled me to get into the train. I saw Mr. Netherton enter a compartment, but with other passengers, so I did not attempt to get in with him. I had thought of the tunnel—it might have helped,—but now it was of no use.

"I have learned over and over again as a soldier never to be in despair if things take a wrong going. There is generally an exit towards a right going if one looks about himself to find one. I smoked two or three cigarettes very hard. And then I made a leetle plan.

"I had previously made a journey from Portsmouth to Eastbourne, and I knew that Brighton was one of the stations where every one must change. One went through a gate from the platform, and entered another platform by a second gate, and at each gate stood a man armed with pinchers who demanded to see one's tickets. That was the chief difficulty. If I could surmount him

there would be a chance. Already it was late in the evening, and darkness would set in between Brighton and Portsmouth. There would be my chance, if I could find this Netherton alone in a compartment. And if I got that chance, I would hope it would bring success with it—though even now I was not sure how it would. I had in my pocket a leetle pistol I always carried, but I did not wish to shoot this man—it would be awkward, and people might not understand. Awkward, look you, for *me*!"

And he drew his hand across his neck, and raised it with a jerk.

"For the rest, I was beginning to get very hungry. I had eaten nothing since leaving Boulogne. And I had only a few pence in my pocket.

"From Lewes to Brighton I was alone in my compartment. I took precautions, for I was not sure whether Mr. Netherton had observed me. I twisted my moustache again and put on my overcoat, which I had only been carrying. In the pocket I found an old cap. So I put it on, and threw my hat out of the window. You would not have thought me the same man who had entered the train at Hastings. It was well that I did this, for when we arrived at Brighton I noticed Mr. Netherton looked very carefully along the train at the passengers as they got out.

"Now came the important moment. Holding my ticket to West Marina in my hand, I pushed myself into the midst of a crowd of people who were going through the gate, thrust the ticket almost into the official's face, and cried with excitement, 'Portsmouth—where is the train for Portsmouth?'

"It succeeded! He was so pressed with taking the other tickets that he hardly glanced at mine. 'Number two platform,' he said. Yes! He did not do his duty very thoroughly, and I passed out of the gate. Splendid!

"I rushed to the office and purchased a first-class ticket to the next station—Hove. This was to admit me through the second gate. That left me twopence, which I spent at the refreshment department on those leetle round things with two currants on the top—yes—*buns*. So! They sufficed for my supper. Splendid!

"Mr. Netherton was a wise man. He evidently knew it was more safe not to travel alone, for I observed him enter a first-class compartment at the front end of the train after some people had made their way in. My only stroke of fortune just then was that the next compartment remained empty; so I entered it.

"It was growing towards darkness when we started, and already the electric lamps in the train were lighted. The journey

was very slow. One stopped at every station. I was very careful not to put my head out of the window when we stopped, to see if the other passengers got out, for I knew it might look suspicious. But I thought of a very simple method by which I could see what was going on. I fastened my leetle pocket-mirror to the end of my walking-stick, and by holding it at an angle by the window I could sit back in my seat and see the outside of the train reflected. It was a long time before the three passengers got out, and then it was quite dark. And I could not be quite sure, even yet, if Mr. Netherton was alone. But my mirror helped me. By putting my stick out of the window I was able to see the reflection of the inside of his compartment. At last I satisfied myself that no one else was there. I could see him seated on the left hand of the compartment, facing the engine, and his leetle bag lying on the seat on his right. Splendid!

"And then it was that I made up my mind what I would do. It was a desperate chance, but my life has been full of desperate chances. Yes!

"It was a very hot night, and the window of Netherton's compartment on the right side of the train was open. I took out my leetle pistol, cocked it, and held it with my teeth, for at first I wanted the use of both my hands. I opened the door of my compartment, on the right side of the train, and got out on to—ah, yes—the footboard of the carriage. There was a brass handle between the compartments, and I held on to it and worked my way along, stooping low, till, with my left hand I grasped the handle of the next door. Then I took my pistol with my right hand.

"My friends, there is nothing that takes a man more by surprise than suddenly putting him into darkness. That was my plan. I am a good shot with a pistol—it is a part of a soldier's business, —and as I raised myself I aimed quickly through the open window at the electric light at the top of the compartment, and fired. My pistol was of small calibre, and the noise of the shot was not much compared with the roar of the train.

"Smash! I had hit it. In an instant all was darkness. *Very* quickly I opened the door and sprang in, reaching towards where I knew was the bag. His hand—for he had presence of mind, this Netherton—grasped the handle at the moment I also held it, but I wrenched it from him. I had intended to try to make an exit again to the footboard and take my chance of a jump when the train went more slowly before the next station. But he was too

quick. Even in the darkness his hand found the collar of my coat, and took hold. Then there was a big struggle. Long ago, when I was in Port Arthur before the Japanese War, I had learned some tricks of jiu-jitsu, but I was much prevented from doing my best, because I had to keep my hold on the bag.

"We did not say a word to each other as we fought in that tar-black—eh? Yes—*pitch*-black compartment. Once I had him down on the seat, but he held me, too. Then the train began to go slow; we were entering a station. Already I caught a glimpse of a dim oil-lamp—the first on the platform.

"He wrenched himself free and made for the door. I saw at once that he meant to give the alarm. But in an instant I was prepared. He assisted my plan by opening the door. The train had not quite stopped when I gave him a big push that sent him sprawling on the platform. And then I immediately, still holding the bag, jumped out on the other side—where I had entered. Splendid!"

Captain Koravitch refilled his glass with vodka, lighted a fresh cigarette, and gave vent to a long chuckling laugh.

"Oh, it was very funnee, that which happened. Listen. He called out loudly, and the guard and two other men, who, I suppose, were the master of the station and a porter, ran to help him. He told them he had been robbed by a thief. 'Quick,' he cried; 'you must catch him. He jumped out of the train on the other side, I think. He is now running away with my bag!' The master of the station, who had a lantern, jumped into the compartment, and held it out at the open door on the other side. 'Yes,' he shouted; 'he has got out here,' and then the passengers put their heads out of the windows, and there was what you call a 'to-do.' Splendid!

"How did I hear all this when I had run away? My friends, I had not run away. I knew better than to stumble about in the darkness and easily to be caught. I had rolled myself underneath the train, and was lying at full length flat on the ground. Splendid!

"Presently the guard said the train must wait no longer. Netherton was very angry, but the guard would not listen. So Netherton said he would stay, and the guard blew his whistle. I pressed myself still closer to the ground, and the train went over me. Immediately afterwards I had rolled myself over the inner rail, and lay close to the edge of the platform.

"I heard Netherton ask—

"'What is this station?'

"'Drayton, sir,' was the reply.

"The lights on the other platform had been extinguished. Very carefully, for the three men were close by, I found a stone, and jerked it over the line. It fell with a rattle somewhere opposite.

"'There he is!' cried Netherton, and all of them dashed across the line to find me. This was my opportunity for escape. I got on the platform, climbed a fence behind it, and dropped down into a field. So I was not asked for my ticket! Splendid! And they were looking for me on the other side. Still more splendid!

"Drayton is a *very* leetle station in the midst of the country. Scarcely a house near. Quite unobserved I made my way across some fields. And presently I came to a big haystack, where I sat down to rest and think. Besides my leetle toilet-case, I carried in my pocket a small electric light. I opened the bag—yes—the parcel was there! But there was something else also there which gave me great joy. A flask of whisky and some biscuits. So I blessed the good Netherton!

"Afterwards I looked into the parcel. It contained the plan of the gun and some notes on the forts of the French frontier. Also, this German 'spy book' of your Army."

And he pointed to the volume on the table.

"For the rest, there is not much to tell. I slept under a haystack—pouf! it was nothing. The night was warm, and I have had much worse bivouacs. In the morning I looked around and saw the spire of a big church, to which I walked. It was the town of Chichester. I waited till the pawnshop opened, and then I got thirty shillings for my watch. After that—a big *déjeuner!* Then I took the train to London. Just as we were starting I saw Netherton standing on the platform across the way. I suppose he had spent the night in Chichester, and was waiting for a train to Portsmouth. I opened the window—my train was already beginning to move——

"'Her Von Neglein!'

"Oh, it was *very* funnee how he started!

"'Here is your bag!' I cried; 'I want him no further.' Yes!

"And I threw it towards him. Ah, yes! I knew that *now* he would not dare to follow me—to have me arrested by the police. For we were both playing the same game, and it does not do to call in the police when you are playing the game of a secret agent.

"In London I took the plans and notes to my chief, and received some money. The German book on your English Army I kept

as a souvenir. Then I journeyed back to Hastings to get my bag at the hotel, and for a few days' holiday, to take off my boots and socks and wash my feet in the sea. There was another day's excursion to Boulogne, and again I took him, this time for pleasure. Again I visited the Casino. Also, again I lost all my money. But I had this time left enough at the hotel to pay my bill and to purchase tickets to return home. Splendid!"

Percival Wilde

THE PILLAR OF FIRE

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I

"Bill," Tony inquired suddenly, "do you believe in mind reading?"

It was Bill's twenty-fifth birthday, and Tony, nobly resolving to help him celebrate it, had invited him—urged him—plagued him to spend a week with him enjoying the many attractions offered by one of Tony's clubs. Bill had held out manfully—some sixth sense had warned him that a week in the company of his restless friend would be anything but a vacation—but even granite will wear away under the drip of water, and after the forty-seventh invitation Bill had capitulated. "I want it understood, however," he bargained, "that if I go with you this time you won't ask me again for a whole year."

Tony stiffened. "Don't you expect to enjoy it?"

"Why, of course——"

"You know I'll do everything in the world to give you a good time——"

"I'm a farmer," Bill had explained hastily. "My idea of a good time is different from yours."

Tony had grunted, and Bill, reluctant to offend his friend, had hastily packed a suitcase. But once installed in the privacy of a stateroom on the train, Tony had welcomed the opportunity to ask questions. Now an inquiring youngster of six can propound

riddles which even a wise man cannot answer, and Tony, being five and one-half times that age, was as many times as inquisitive —and even more persistent.

For six years Bill Parmelee had followed the hazardous calling of a professional cardsharp. He had reformed; had done much to atone for his past by unmasking those of his former colleagues who still insisted upon preying on too-trustful acquaintances; and while the train speeded southward along the Atlantic coast he did even more by attempting valorously to answer the deluge of questions hurled at him by his insatiably curious friend.

For some deep, mysterious reason, unexplained and unexplainable, anything that has to do with the subject of dishonest gambling is fascinatingly interesting to the average man. Tony showed himself no exception. Methodically, proceeding in orderly fashion from year to year, from month to month, even from day to day, he pumped his informant dry of every detail having to do with his much-checkered career.

Bill had nothing to conceal and met him in a spirit of complete frankness. He told how he had run away from home at the age of eighteen; how he had been introduced to the methods employed to make games of chance less chancy; how he had gradually become so familiar with those methods that he had qualified as a master of them. He unlocked the door of his reminiscences, and dwelt upon its high lights—and its shadows; its triumphs—and its reverses; its brief periods of prosperity—and its long periods of adversity; and Tony Claghorn, like Oliver Twist, demanded more and more.

Time and again Bill leaped desperately for the end of his story, attempted to terminate his autobiography by explaining, in a few words, how and why he had finally turned a new leaf, become a farmer, and forsworn the devious ways of his youth. But Tony, enjoying himself hugely, would not permit this, and kept his friend busy describing and annotating the earlier episodes which he found so interesting.

Anything—even an autobiography—must come to an end, and at quarter-past four in the afternoon Tony had asked and Bill had answered the final question. And then, while Bill, gazing out of the window, was mentally comparing a herd of Guernseys with his own sleek Jerseys, Tony opened a subject whose discussion might well prove interminable.

"Bill," he repeated, "do you believe in mind reading?"

Bill sighed. "Well, do you believe in it?" he countered wearily.

Tony settled himself in a judicial attitude. "Yes and no," he admitted.

"Meaning?"

"I'm a broad-minded man and I'm always open to conviction."

"And have you ever been convicted—I mean, convinced?" inquired Bill.

Tony nodded gravely. "Yes," he admitted.

Bill nodded with equal gravity. "Then there's nothing more to be said," he declared. The rhythmic click of the wheels was lulling him; he half-closed his eyes.

But Tony had barely begun. "Bill," he commanded, "get your mind on this."

"I can talk just as well in my sleep."

"Not to me," declared Tony emphatically. "We were discussing mind reading," he recalled, somewhat superfluously, "and I was about to tell you that I had seen examples of it."

"Such as?"

"Well," said Tony reflectively, "there was a chap I met some years ago who could do a very wonderful trick with three cards. He'd show you the faces before he started—one of them was a king——"

Bill interrupted. "And then he'd shuffle them clumsily, and bet you couldn't locate it."

"Yes."

"You'd win the first time, and the second time, but the third time, if the bet was big enough, you'd lose. You'd think that was impossible, because you'd noticed that the king was dog-eared. You knew the back of the card as well as you knew the face. Only when you put your money on it, you'd find that the dog-ear had gotten straightened out, and that another card—not the king—had become dog-eared at the same time. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And you called that mind reading? Tony, I'm ashamed of you!"

"He knew what was in my mind, didn't he?" persisted the clubman. "He knew I noticed the dog-ear. If that wasn't mind reading, what is it?"

"It was nothing but relying on an old, old maxim," retorted Bill.

"What maxim?" demanded Tony somewhat angrily.

Bill gazed innocently out of the window. "Tony, old fellow, it's a maxim to the effect that there's one born every minute."

"A sucker?"

"That word will do as well as any other."

Tony snorted. "Perhaps you'll say the same thing about the Marleys."

"Who are they?"

"Haven't you heard of them? The woman sits on the stage, blindfolded, and the man goes out into the audience——"

"And then the woman reads out what you've written on a piece of paper——"

"Yes."

"Or tells you the number engraved in your watch; or the initials on your ring; or the name of the maker of your hat——"

"Yes. Now that's mind reading, isn't it?"

Bill smiled wearily. "Tony, some time when we've got a few hours to spare I'll teach you how to do that with me. It might come in handy some time."

"You mean," gasped Tony, "that you know how it's done?"

Bill nodded. "I was taught by a tramp whom I met in a freight car. He had played the vaudeville houses with his partner. Then he took to drink, and got his signals mixed one night. That finished him. You see, when the sheriff's wife wrote on a bit of paper 'Whom does my husband love?' something went wrong, and the blindfolded lady answered, 'A beautiful young woman with blue eyes and golden hair."

"What of that?" queried Tony.

"Not much," said Bill, "only the sheriff's wife was so far from beautiful that she had no delusions on the subject—and she wasn't young—and, barring streaks of grey in her hair, she was a decided brunette. And she'd been having her suspicions about that husband of hers for a long time! The show stopped right there and the mind reader hopped on the first train leaving that town. He knew that the sheriff would be after him if he lingered."

"If he had been a mind reader," commented Tony, "a real mind reader, he would have foreseen trouble."

Bill laughed. "He foresaw trouble without the least difficulty, and he wasn't a mind reader! It didn't take a mind reader to do that—it needed nothing but plain common sense." Again he closed his eyes. "And now for a snooze," he murmured.

"What happened to the mind reader?" insisted Tony.

"Oh, he stuck to his trade and became prosperous again. We landed in St. Louis together. We were broke, both of us. He fixed that in short order. He'd walk into a saloon. He'd start talking

about cards. He'd start talking about mind reading. Then he'd get into an argument with the best-dressed man in the place, and he'd invite him to pick any card out of a deck, call me on the telephone, and hear me tell him what card he held in his hand."

"It can't be done!" ejaculated Tony.

"There were lots of fellows who thought that way. In fact, they'd bet real money that it couldn't be done. My partner never went near the telephone, mind you. He'd say, "Call such and such a number, and ask for Mr. Parmelee."

"And you would name the card?"

"Every time."

"By George," admitted Tony, "that's wonderful!"

"Quite so," drawled Bill. "My partner visited eight or ten places a night. We started off with small bets: we had to, because we began with only five dollars between us. But we split up over a thousand when we decided that it was time for us to make tracks."

"There was no reason that you should not have stayed there indefinitely."

"Oh, yes, there was! You see, the men who lost their bets might have found out that——"

"What could they have found out?"

Bill grinned reminiscently. "They might have found out that I had fifty-two different names! They'd call the same number every time—it was a public telephone in a cigar store—but once my partner would tell them to ask for 'Mr. Parmelee,' and once for 'Mr. Henderson,' and once for 'Mr. Bancroft,' and sometimes for 'Mr. Conroy,' or 'Mr. Hanford.' Of course I'd be standing right next to the 'phone all the time."

Tony corrugated his brows. "What's the big idea?"

"Don't you see it yet?" laughed Bill. "Each name indicated a different card. 'Parmelee' was the jack of spades—that was my partner's idea of humour; 'Henderson' was the queen of hearts; 'Hanford' was the queen of spades. Nothing could have been simpler: the first letter of the name told me the denomination of the card; the first vowel told me the suit. We had memorised a code—that was all."

"Whew!" whistled Tony.

"We couldn't work it more than once on the same crowd. That was the only objection to the scheme," confessed Bill, "but in a good-sized town we wouldn't do badly—not at all."

He turned to his bewildered friend, who was gazing at him

with open mouth. "Tony," he declared, "any time you hear of a mind reading exhibition more wonderful than that, you let me know where it is—I want to see it."

"I'll remember that," Tony promised. And he was so impressed that he allowed Bill to go to sleep without a protest, not to be wakened until they reached their destination.

II

When a man belongs to one club, he is likely to belong to another; and when he belongs to two, a third is nearly as inevitable as death and taxes. Tony belonged to the Windsor and to the Himalaya—had joined the first because it was the thing to do, and had joined the second in reaction against the oppressive respectability of the first.

The Windsor was rich, dignified, and exclusive; the Himalaya was rich, undignified, and the reverse of exclusive. By dividing his time between the two Tony convinced himself that he was neither too respectable nor too disreputable, neither a prig nor a sporting man, and ambled along on a middle course which impressed him as being just right. A spree at the Himalaya was atoned for by a staid evening at the Windsor; and after sojourning a while in the highly moral atmosphere of the latter organisation, a visit to the former would bring Tony back to the less exalted plane upon which he felt that he belonged. Membership in the Windsor alone would have branded Tony a snob; membership in the Himalaya alone would have marked him out as a rounder; membership in both qualified him far more congenially as a man about town, a true democrat equally at home in every society.

Yet a third club was necessary to the complete happiness of Tony and of other young men similarly situated, with the result that a select group of them, taking into consideration the frequent vacations which a lifetime of doing nothing demanded, founded that justly celebrated organisation, the Riggs Island Association.

There were rumours that the association had been formed because Huntley Thornton, who had owned Riggs Island, a scrubby patch of sand off the South Carolina coast, had been anxious to sell it, and being in the real-estate business had painted its attractions to his friends in such glowing colours that he had been enabled to get out at a profit. This, however, was mere hearsay, and was never substantiated. Certain it was that Huntley Thorn-

ton had been a prime mover in bringing the Riggs Island Association into existence, and that his friends, oversupplied with money, and enraptured at the thought of an island paradise whither they might retreat to recuperate whenever so minded, had rallied loyally to his support.

To them it mattered nothing that the property consisted only of a few barren acres, a clump of discouraged scrub pines, and a billion gnats. The architect's drawings, prepared under Huntley Thornton's personal direction, featured a golf course, half a dozen tennis courts, a stone clubhouse, and a magnificent beach, and made no mention at all of the already existing features. Thornton's friends gazed upon the handsomely-framed water colours, admired the details, commended the general plan, and dug deep into their pockets for the funds which presently transformed a dream into a reality. In the process the original subscribers nobly paid assessment after assessment, but, as Chet Moulton said, "After we've spent a fortune on the clubhouse we can't shy at the cost of a breakwater. Hang it all, if we do, the clubhouse will be washed into the Atlantic Ocean!" The breakwater had been merely one of the costly necessities which Huntley Thornton's architect had not thought it necessary to mention. There were others—many, many others.

When the clubhouse was finished, when the tennis courts had been rolled to a glass-like smoothness, and the golf course had been completed, Thornton's friends journeyed down in groups, strolled over the property, admired the perfection of its appointments, and decided that it would do. Tony Claghorn trod experimentally on the tennis courts, hazarded the opinion that they would be fast—and never played. Chet Moulton cast an appraising eye upon the golf links, opined that par on the first hole should be four and not five—and never teed up a ball. Steve Forrester inspected the billiard tables, cast a languid glance at the rows of gleaming cues—but did not remove his coat to click off a few caroms. By tacit agreement the older men—those over thirty—left all forms of exercise to their juniors.

But it was on the beach, a spotless white strip protected by the costly breakwater, that all members met. It was Chet Moulton who first donned a bathing-suit, stuck an experimental toe into the water, and declared that the Atlantic Ocean, as sampled at Riggs Island, met with his approval. It was neither too cold nor too warm; there was neither too much nor too little current—this he discovered upon venturing in farther; and there was just

enough tingle in the waves to make Chet—aged thirty-four—feel, as he himself expressed it, twenty years younger.

It was Steve Forrester, however, who discovered that the beach, gently sloping, firm, and warm to sit upon, was quite as suitable for games of chance as for more strenuous pursuits. "Think of it, boys," he exclaimed, "I'll go home tanned like a bronze statue, and if anybody asks me where I got it, I'll mention I got sunburned playing poker!"

The conception tickled Steve's risibilities mightily. To don a bathing-suit immediately upon rising; to proceed to the beach after breakfast; to remain there, with occasional intermissions for meals, a stack of chips at one hand, and a long, cold drink at the other, from morning till night!—the programme was most attractive. His fellow members voted for it enthusiastically, and the demand for lotions to be applied to smarting shoulders was heavy for a few days. But after that the participants in the game became well hardened, and at nearly any hour a group of young men, tanned to a chrome-leather hue, might have been discovered squatting on the sand, listening to the plash of the waves, and debating mentally whether to raise or to call.

The tennis courts were often deserted, the golf links neglected; but the beach was patronised so incessantly that one could not walk across it, Chet Moulton complained, without stubbing a toe on a poker chip. "What are the wild waves saying?" inquired Chet. "Are they saying, 'Splash'? Not on your life. They're whispering 'Ante up!'"

In games, as everywhere else, there is the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. At the Riggs Island Association, beach poker, as it was quickly called, drove everything else to the wall. They all played—all except Huntley Thornton, who made up for his non-participation in the games by acting as a lone spectator at them. Attired in immaculate flannels, jaunty in a Panama hat, with a cigarette, in a six-inch amber holder, decorating his smiling countenance all day long, Thornton wandered from group to group, congratulating the winners, sympathising with the losers, and sooner or later squatting down to give his undivided attention to the play in the steepest game.

Repeatedly urged to take a hand, he had as often declined. "It may seem funny to you," he admitted, with a smile, "but I've never sat in a poker game in my life."

"No time to learn like the present."

"I promised my old mother," said Thornton, "that I would

never gamble. I have yet to break that promise. I kept it in college. I kept it after college. I intend to keep it now."

Chet Moulton, who had just seen the most lucrative pot of the hour pass to an opponent, grinned ruefully. "Huntley," he declared, "I wish my mother had exacted a promise like that from me. It would have saved me a lot of money." Chet's sentiments were sincere. He had shown unlimited faith in a full hand, jacks up. He had backed it magnificently, only to see it lose dismally to a quartet of five-spots held by Don Felton. "If I had made a promise like that," mourned Chet, "and if I had kept it, I might have been a bloated capitalist to-day. Who knows?"

"And if I had made such a promise," said Felton, carefully stacking his winnings, "I wouldn't be taking in this pot now."

"Never too late to start," suggested Chet. "You might give it back."

"I might—and then again, I might not," murmured Felton. He glanced at his cards, grinned at the disconsolate Chet, and tossed a chip into the centre of the little patch of sand about which they were sitting. "I'll open for the limit," he challenged.

It was into this atmosphere that Tony Claghorn brought his friend, Bill Parmelee, for a complete rest.

III

"Your coming will be something of a sensation," predicted Tony, as he led the way to the launch which was to take them from the mainland to the island.

"How so?"

"You're a very well-known man, Bill. Everybody else knows it, even if you don't. I dare say that there's not a member of the club who hasn't heard of you."

"And you expect me to enjoy my vacation?"

"Why not?"

The ex-gambler shook his head. "I was never a great hand at advertising," he declared. "I'd prefer it—I'd prefer it greatly if not a soul knew me. Look here, he demanded suddenly, "have you told anybody I'm coming?"

"No," said Tony reluctantly, "I was saving that for a surprise."

"Well, suppose you save it a little longer."

"What do you mean?"

"Introduce me as your friend Brown—Bill Brown—that's a nice

inoffensive name. Let me forget business—my peculiar kind of business—for a few days."

Tony's face fell. "I was rather set on introducing you to the boys. You see, I've told them so much about you."

Bill laughed. "Look here, old man," he inquired, "for whose pleasure did you get up this vacation? Theirs—or mine?"

"Yours, of course."

"Then remember my name is Bill Brown."

It hurt to do it, but it was under that name that Tony presented his friend to Huntley Thornton—and to Chet Moulton—and to Steve Forrester—and to the twenty or thirty other congenial spirits sojourning at the club. When, in conformity with established custom, the new arrivals donned bathing-suits, and were promptly drafted into games of beach poker, Tony nearly burst in the effort to keep his secret buried in his bosom. Felton, indeed, had asked Bill if he played, and Tony, beginning indignantly, "Does he play!" had been reminded to keep silence by a violent dig in his unprotected ribs.

To his distress, his friend was separated from him. As a newcomer, Felton, who invariably played in the steepest game, invited Bill to sit in. Tony, being a regular, found himself seated some twenty feet away—and nearly broke his neck in an attempt to observe what was happening to Bill. From time to time voices reached his ear; from time to time he observed Huntley Thornton, the lone spectator, intently watching the game in which he never took part; from time to time the players in his own game invited him to pay a little attention to it. But it was not until darkness had put an end to the afternoon's play that Tony received any authentic news from the front.

He led his friend out of earshot of the others. "How much did you win?" he inquired eagerly.

"I lost," said Bill.

"W-what?" stammered Tony. "You—you lost?"

"I lost. I lost heavily."

To Tony it seemed impossible that such a thing should ever occur to his friend. Then an improbable explanation flashed into his mind. "I understand, Bill," he guessed, "you were afraid of making them suspicious. You lost on purpose."

Bill laughed. "Why should I lose on purpose?" he countered. "In any event, why should I let them get into me for more than five hundred dollars? And what on earth should they be suspicious of? No; I didn't lose on purpose? I'm not a philanthropist. I

tried my darndest to win. And I didn't win because another fellow played a better game than I did. That happens sometimes, you know."

Tony choked. "But—but it's impossible!" he sputtered.

"Thanks for the compliment," smiled Bill.

"It's impossible," Tony insisted, "and I know it's impossible because I've played with every man in this club. There's not one of them that's in a class with you."

"How about Felton?"

"Don Felton?"

"The big fellow with the sandy hair."

"Was he the big winner?" gasped Tony.

"The big winner and the only winner."

Tony swallowed hard. "I played with him in New York, at the Himalaya, only a month ago, and I cleaned him out."

It was Bill's turn to swallow. "You—you cleaned him out?" he stammered.

"Without the least difficulty," asseverated Tony. His brain was whirling. "Lord knows I'm no crack," he pursued, "I play a tolerable game—a good average game—and I've played with enough really good players to know just where I get off. I'm not an expert——"

"And Felton?"

Tony threw up his hands. "Felton's game is to mine as my game is to yours. A month ago he wasn't even near my class."

"Yet to-day he played better poker than I did. He outguessed me from beginning to end. If he called, his cards were just a shade better than mine. And every time I had a really good hand he didn't even raise. He'd drop."

"He must have improved," said Tony idiotically.

"I'll say so," declared Bill. "If the man I played with to-day wasn't in your class a month ago——"

"He must have improved lots."

The eyes of the two men met. Yet it was Tony who voiced the thought that both were probably thinking. "There are many cheating devices," he murmured, "but which of them could be used by a man sitting on a sandy beach, in blazing sunlight, dressed in a one-piece bathing-suit?"

"None that I know of," said Bill.

IV

Tony returned to the attack at the first opportunity and that meant immediately after supper. With great self-control he had refrained from alluding to the subject for ninety consecutive minutes.

"The cards might have been marked," he suggested.

"They weren't."

"Are you sure?"

"I gathered up three or four after our talk, Tony. I have them in my pocket this minute. They're not marked—and I've gone over them with a glass."

"Felton might have resorted to sleight of hand."

"Not with me watching," said the ex-gambler emphatically. "It's gotten to be unconscious with me, I suppose, but I always watch the deal carefully."

"Then how did he do it?"

Bill's blue eyes twinkled. "Maybe he studied some good book on poker."

"Be serious, Bill."

"All right, I'll be serious," Bill promised. "On my word of honour, old fellow, I don't know how he did it. But I mean to find out."

It was Tony's turn to smile. "Nice, pleasant way of spending a vacation, isn't it? This is how you get away from cards for a change."

Bill grinned. "If I learn something new I won't complain."

"And in the meantime the problem is how can a man cheat, without marked cards, without sleight-of-hand, and dressed in a bathing-suit."

"That's all," assented Bill.

It is to be feared that Tony's night was far from peaceful. He tossed from side to side, a prey to weird speculations, racking his brains in an effort to discover some solution to the mystery. Dawn found him advanced not a step. In desperation he appealed to his friend.

"Bill, to-day when you play, let me watch."

"What for?"

"I might see something you don't."

Parmelee shook his head emphatically. "Tony, old fellow, you'd spoil it all. Felton's playing me for a sucker. It's an unusual part for me, and I'm enjoying it. But he'd stop like a shot if he thought

I suspected. No, Tony, you can help me most by going about your own business and leaving me strictly alone."

Tony refused to be put off. "Look here," he insisted, "if you won't let me watch, you won't mind if I pass the word to Huntley Thornton?"

"What good would that do?"

"Huntley would keep his weather-eye open. Huntley always looks on."

It spoke volumes for Bill's self-control that he replied civilly. "He knows nothing about cards. He told me so himself."

"Even so——"

"Tony, with what you know about me, are you really advising me to go to an amateur for assistance?"

"I don't know why not," ventured Tony.

"If you don't, then I do," said Bill decisively. "When I need a guardian, old man, I'll let you know. But for the time being I'll struggle on without help. And if you breathe a word to a soul I'll brain you!"

That threat kept Claghorn silent during the morning, but it did not prevent him from sidling up to Bill at noon to inquire, "How did it go?"

"Great!"

"You won?"

"I lost six hundred more."

"And you call that great?" gasped Tony.

"I call that most satisfactory," Bill declared. "For the first time I'm beginning to get my bearings."

Despite Tony's urgent questions he declined to add another word and left his friend in a condition bordering on collapse. Not once, but a dozen times, had Tony been an eye-witness of Bill's expertness at the profession which had been forced upon him: the profession of unmasking sharpers. Yet the memory of his repeated triumphs was less potent than the realisation that for once Bill was facing an extraordinary situation, and had, so far, met nothing but defeat.

Pride goeth before a fall; and Tony's pride in his idol departed on wings. Twenty-four hours earlier he would unhesitatingly have wagered his last cent that no problem connected with the devious arts of dishonest gambling was too difficult for the man who had solved so many. The events of the immediate past had shattered his faith to such an extent that he had seriously offered his own help. That declined, he had offered, with equal

seriousness, to ask Huntley Thornton—whose ignorance of cards was well known—to take Bill—whose knowledge of the subject was profound—under his wing.

The utter insanity of his proposals never occurred to Tony. Uppermost in his mind was the thought that his friend was in trouble, and that any straw was necessarily a promising straw.

During the afternoon Tony played so carelessly that for the first time in several sessions he found himself a winner. Had he stopped to analyse his own game he might have made the instructive discovery that it was undoubtedly at its best when his mind was not on it. But Tony was far too much concerned with graver matters to indulge in any such reflections. Being a winner, he retired from the game after an hour, and nonchalantly strolled towards the group which included Bill. At a distance of fifteen feet he was greeted with a look so fearful that he beat a hasty retreat.

Somewhat offended, he strode manfully into the water, and splashed around for an unconscionable period, a prey to disturbing meditations. How, he asked himself repeatedly, could a man cheat—attired only in a bathing-suit? The answer was perfectly clear: it could not be done, and Tony was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that his friend's game had deteriorated.

This decision was confirmed when at the end of the afternoon's play he made his way to Bill's side and hissed, "Well?"

The ex-gambler smiled cryptically.

"Well?" repeated Tony.

"Very well," said Bill.

Tony might have pursued his investigations further had he not, at that moment, discerned Huntley Thornton, immaculate as always, stealthily endeavouring to attract his attention from the other end of the beach.

V

"Claghorn," began Thornton, "you don't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all."

"Not even if they're rather personal questions about a friend of yours?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

Thornton wasted no time in beating around the bush. "Claghorn, I want to find out something about your guest, Mr. William

Brown. Who is he? What is he? What do you know about him?"

Utterly astounded, Tony sparred for time. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he's a card-cheat," said Thornton flatly.

Tony gasped. "W-what did you say?" he sputtered.

"He's a card-cheat," Thornton repeated dispassionately. "How he does it, what methods he uses, I don't know. But the fact remains, nevertheless. I don't pretend to be an authority on cards. Quite the contrary, I am rather less than a novice; so I can't say how it's possible for a man—dressed in a bathing-suit—to cheat——"

The familiar words echoed in Tony's ears. "Possible?" he interrupted. "Why, it isn't possible."

"That's what I would have said in advance; but after what he did to poor Don Felton——"

"What he did?" Tony interrupted again. "Why, he lost five hundred to him yesterday."

"Yes."

"He lost six hundred more this morning."

"Quite so."

"And this afternoon I suppose he lost seven hundred."

"I'm sorry to say he didn't, Claghorn," said Thornton coldly. "This afternoon he got Don to raise the stakes, and he picked him clean."

"What?" gasped Tony. "He won?"

"He began by winning back the eleven hundred he had lost," said Thornton. "Then he won as much more from Don. Then he suggested raising the limit—which Don did, very foolishly—and it took your friend Brown less than an hour more to separate Don from every cent he had in the world."

Something in Tony urged him to cheer; to execute a dance of triumph; to shout his satisfaction aloud. But, for once, soberer second thought was with him, and he only murmured, "Isn't that too bad?"

"It's much too bad, Claghorn; it's very much too bad!"

"Tst! Tst!" clucked Tony.

"Don isn't a rich man——"

"No."

"The loss of the money means a lot to him."

"Of course it does."

"If he had lost it fairly and squarely——"

"What makes you think he didn't?" Tony interrupted.

"Impossible!" Thornton snapped. "This morning your friend Brown—so Felton said—played like a beginner. This afternoon he was infallible. Now, a man doesn't improve that much in an hour or two."

Familiar words! Familiar words! Inwardly Tony exulted, but he remarked shrewdly, "It was all right, you mean, so long as Brown played like a beginner, but it was all wrong the moment he began to play like an expert."

"That's not what I mean," said Thornton, "and you know it isn't."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean this," and in the gathering darkness Tony could see his fists clench, "there's something wrong—something very wrong, indeed—somewhere. I want to find out what it is."

Tony smiled happily. "Why do you come to me?" he asked innocently.

"Because, like everybody else, I've heard of this Parmelee friend of yours, this man who makes it a business to expose cheats. I've heard how he showed up Graham in Palm Beach; and I've heard how he showed up others in New York. Now, if you will be so kind, I'd like you to wire Parmelee, and ask him to come here at once, at my expense, to investigate this man Brown."

Describing the episode afterwards Tony said: "I don't know how I stopped myself from breaking out into laughter. The idea was rich: asking Bill Parmelee to investigate himself! I was thankful that it was dark, and that Thornton couldn't see my face. Never in my life did I have a harder time keeping it straight!"

Thornton repeated his request: "I want you to wire for Parmelee. He's the man for the job. I want him to watch Brown play; to play with him himself if he wants to. And then I want him to expose him."

It was at this point that a familiar figure approached through the darkness, and Bill Parmelee—alias Brown—fully dressed, joined the speakers. "I couldn't help overhearing what you just said, Mr. Thornton," he declared. "I'm a great hand at coming right down to brass tacks. Let's have it out."

To say that Thorton was angry would be an under-statement. He was furious; beside himself with rage; and he began to speak in a tone which trembled with passion. Tony, listening, wondered why Thornton should take Felton's troubles so greatly to heart; and he wondered still more why Parmelee, sitting near him in

the darkness, allowed the vitriolic blast to continue unchecked. Thornton was nothing if not specific: he did not hesitate to call names; to couple them with unpleasant adjectives; to express his opinions in the most elaborately insulting language.

To the torrent of invective, Bill answered not a word. It was only when Thornton ran out of breath, and stopped temporarily that Bill asked calmly, "Mr. Thornton, have you a cigarette?"

Utterly taken aback Thornton offered his case. Bill reached for it in the darkness, and found it.

"Have you a match?" Bill asked.

Tony had never seen his friend smoke. To his boundless astonishment, Bill now lighted a cigarette, inhaled a breath or two, and turned to his enemy.

"Go ahead, Mr. Thornton," he invited.

What followed according to Tony beggared description. Thornton, curiously confused, launched again into his invective. That it did not disturb Bill greatly was evidenced by the intermittent glimmer from his cigarette in the darkness. And then, in the middle of a word, Thornton stopped—stopped dead.

For a minute—two minutes—while Tony marvelled—there was absolute silence. Then, in curiously different voice, Thornton said, "I understand, Mr. Parmelee."

"Mr. Parmelee!" Tony felt his hair rising on end. By what process had Thornton discovered his identity? But he was speaking again.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Claghorn," faltered Thornton. "I'm sorry I made such a scene." He paused—paused for another unearthly wait while the cigarette twinkled. "In the morning, Mr. Parmelee; yes, I'll leave in the morning. Felton will go, too. I will answer for him. We are grateful, Mr. Parmelee, both of us." Again an unearthly pause, while Tony clenched his fists and wondered what supernatural forces were at work. Then, in a broken voice, Thornton was speaking: "Do you insist, Mr. Parmelee?" Utterly crushed, he turned to Tony. "Mr. Claghorn, at Mr. Parmelee's request, I tell you that Felton cheated—and that I was his accomplice. Is that enough, Mr. Parmelee? . . . Thank you. . . . Good night."

Through the darkness came the sound of Thornton's retreating footsteps. Then, in a glowing arc, Bill's cigarette flew through the air, to fall with a gentle hiss into the ocean.

Again Tony felt his hair rising. He had been in the presence of something strangely mysterious, something so uncanny that it

partook of the miraculous. He stretched out a trembling hand and seized his friend's knee. "Bill," he begged, "for Heaven's sake, what was it?"

Came the familiar laugh, and then, for the first time in many minutes, the sound of Bill's voice. "It was mind reading," he said.

VI

It was not until they were again seated in the train, nearly a week later, that Bill consented to answer Tony's innumerable questions. Prior to that time he had maintained a stony silence. Even when Huntley Thornton and Don Felton had suddenly decided to go fishing in southern Florida, and had departed, bag and baggage, before daybreak, Bill had had no comment to offer.

"Surely you could have told me then," Tony protested.

"Why? You would never have been satisfied until you had told it to every man in the club."

"And why not?"

"You would have shown them up."

"They should have been shown up."

"I wonder!" said Bill. "They were amateurs—nothing but amateurs—and it's so much easier to ruin reputations than to make them. If I had spoken, I would have branded those two men for the rest of their lives. As it is, they've gone off together where they can think things over, and they may decide that honesty isn't such a bad policy after all."

"Humph!" snorted Tony.

"In the bottom of your heart, old fellow, you agree with me. I've shown up a good many men—but they've deserved it. These two were in a class by themselves. They'd made a mistake. I've given them a chance to let it be forgotten. If they go wrong again—well, it won't be on my conscience." He smiled. "Is that so, Tony?"

"I guess so," Tony admitted. "In fact, I'll agree with anything if you tell me just what happened. To me, it's all as clear as mud."

Bill laughed. "It began in a funny way. When I lost to Felton on that first afternoon, I had no suspicion that anything was wrong. He played as if he knew every card in my hand. Well, that's what I'd expect of a really fine player. I thought Felton was one.

"Then you told me what you knew about him: that he wasn't

even in your class, and I tried to put two and two together. Generally two and two make four—but this time they didn't, and it wasn't until the next morning that I began to suspect what was going on. It was really the simplest thing in the world when I once put my mind on it. The cards weren't marked; Felton wasn't doing any legerdemain—he wasn't nearly clever enough for that—yet he played as if he knew just what I held. There could be only one answer: he did actually know, and that meant that somebody was telling him.

"When you play indoors, your cards are dealt on to a table; you gather them together; you raise the pips just enough to read them, and you leave them right on the table. At any rate, that's what you do if you're a professional gambler—and I'm a professional. But playing on the sand you can't do that because it would take acrobatics. Instead, you take up your cards—and unless you hold them mighty close, a man sitting behind you can read them.

"That's where Thornton came in. I'm not a stingy player, and the moment I started betting liberally, Thornton plunked himself down where he could watch. Then he signalled my holdings to his partner."

"How did he do it?"

"It cost me six hundred dollars to find out. Naturally I couldn't face him. I watched him out of the corner of my eye: that was all I dared. Even then, it took me an hour to discover his system—it was so beautifully simple that you would never notice it if you weren't looking for it."

"Well? Well?" said Tony impatiently.

"Did you ever see Thornton without a cigarette in his mouth?" Bill inquired.

Tony could not control his vexation. "Bill," he pleaded, "I'm not a bit interested in Thornton's personal habits. And I'm very much interested in his method of signalling."

"You won't see a thing when it's right under your nose—or under his nose, I should say," laughed Bill. "That was how he did it. His cigarette, man! His cigarette!"

"What about it?"

"Well, it smoked, didn't it? It could produce short puffs, and it could produce long puffs—and it could produce any required alternation of them, couldn't it?"

"You mean——?" gasped Tony.

"I mean Thornton's cigarette was sending perfectly good

Morse. And I thanked my lucky stars that telegraphy was one of the things I picked up in my six years on the road. Of course Thornton abbreviated: he didn't have to spell out, 'He's holding two pairs, kings up,' when it took no particular genius to condense that into three letters, and he didn't have to telegraph, 'Mr. Brown has just filled a straight, jack high,' when he could say the same thing in two letters. In fact, he didn't have to use Morse—a prearranged code would have answered just as well—and it would have given me no more trouble."

"How on earth could you beat such a team?"

"By playing straight poker," said Bill. "In the afternoon, instead of sitting up, I lay down, held my cards so that I could barely see them myself, and played the great American game just as well as I knew how. One of the peculiarities of beach poker," commented Bill, "is that you can play it lying on your stomach. I did—and for twenty-four hours afterwards I had a crick in the neck to show for it.

"I won back the eleven hundred I had lost in short order; and then Felton made the mistake of losing his temper. He had whipped me so easily that morning—and the day before—that he couldn't quite reconcile himself to the sudden change in the state of affairs. He got angry, and when I suggested raising the limit, he got angrier, but he didn't decline." Bill sighed reminiscently. "It was quick work after that, and towards the end I had Thornton telegraphing, 'Stop! Stop! Stop!' That was all he could telegraph, and it only made his partner more furious than ever." He chuckled. "I enjoyed that game: 'pon my word, I did!"

"And then?" said Tony.

"What do you mean?"

"How do you explain what you did to Thornton? I never saw anything more wonderful in my life. He started in to abuse you —to call you every name he could think of—and you stopped him, you crushed him, you made him confess without saying a word. And then you insisted it was mind reading!"

Bill laughed. "Tony, old fellow, my artistic temperament is to blame. I hadn't thought of it until I walked back to the beach, but it suddenly struck me what a masterly touch it would be to pay Thornton out in his own coin—to tell him what I had to say with one of his own cigarettes!"

"You mean—you telegraphed?"

"I did."

"With puffs of smoke?"

"Not in the dark, old fellow. I remembered the Good Book: the 'pillar of cloud' and the 'pillar of fire'; I said what I had to say with the burning tip of my cigarette, and believe me, I didn't mince matters!"

He smiled as Tony gazed at him open-mouthed. "I am not ordinarily a profane man," said Bill, "but if you had been able to read what I said to Thornton, even you would have blushed. I'll bet he did."

He paused, to witness Tony shaking in the throes of Homeric laughter. "There's something about it," Tony gasped, between explosions, "something about—the idea—of swearing—profanely —with the end—of a cigarette—that strikes me—as being awfully —awfully—funny!" For an instant he mastered himself. Then he was off again. "To think—to think—that he asked me to send for Bill Parmelee—to investigate Bill Parmelee!"

"It would have been awkward, wouldn't it?" Bill admitted. He grinned as his friend went into spasm after spasm of uncontrollable laughter.

But the final question came later. "Bill," asked Tony, long after, "did those fellows—Thornton and Felton—actually think you cheated?"

Bill chuckled. "They did, Tony, and that's the chief reason why I forgave them. I didn't cheat. Of course I didn't cheat. But they thought I did. They were sure I did. They were such awful dubs, such hopeless amateurs, that they didn't recognise really good play when they saw it."

"Tony, old man," Bill concluded, "in my long career I've had compliments—many compliments. But to be accused of cheating because my game is so good: I'll never ask for a finer one than that!"

SECTION II

STORIES OF MYSTERY AND HORROR

Stacy Aumonier

MISS BRACEGIRDLE DOES HER DUTY

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"This is the room, madame."

"Ah, thank you—thank you."

"Does it appear satisfactory to madame?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you—quite."

"Does madame require anything further?"

"Er—if not too late, may I have a hot bath?"

"*Parfaitement,* madame. The bathroom is at the end of the passage on the left. I will go and prepare it for madame."

"There is one thing more. I have had a very long journey. I am very tired. Will you please see that I am not disturbed in the morning until I ring?"

"Certainly, madame."

Millicent Bracegirdle was speaking the truth—she *was* tired. But then, in the sleepy cathedral town of Easingstoke, from which she came, it was customary for everyone to speak the truth. It was customary, moreover, for everyone to lead simple, self-denying lives—to give up their time to good works and elevating thoughts. One had only to glance at little Miss Bracegirdle to see that in her were epitomised all the virtues and ideals of Easingstoke. Indeed, it was the pursuit of duty which had brought her to the Hôtel de l'Ouest at Bordeaux on this summer's night. She had travelled from Easingstoke to London, then without a break to Dover, crossed that horrid stretch of sea to Calais, entrained for Paris, where of necessity she had to spend four hours—a terrifying experience—and then had come on to Bordeaux, arriving at midnight. The reason of this journey being that someone had to come to Bordeaux to meet her young sister-in-law, who was arriving the next day from South America. The sister-in-law was married to a missionary in Paraguay, but the climate not agreeing with her, she was returning to England. Her dear brother, the dean, would have come himself, but the claims on his time were so extensive, the parishioners would miss him so—it was clearly Millicent's duty to go.

She had never been out of England before, and she had a horror of travel, and an ingrained distrust of foreigners. She spoke a little French, sufficient for the purpose of travel and for obtaining any modest necessities, but not sufficient for carrying on any kind of conversation. She did not deplore this latter fact, for she was of opinion that French people were not the kind of people that one would naturally want to have conversation with; broadly speaking, they were not quite "nice," in spite of their ingratiating manners.

She unpacked her valise, placed her things about the room, tried to thrust back the little stabs of home-sickness as she visualised her darling room at the deanery. How strange and hard and unfriendly seemed these foreign hotel bedrooms! No chintz and lavender and photographs of all the dear family, the dean, the nephews and nieces, the interior of the Cathedral during harvest festival; no samplers and needlework or coloured reproductions of the paintings by Marcus Stone. Oh, dear, how foolish she was! What *did* she expect?

She disrobed, and donned a dressing-gown; then, armed with a sponge-bag and towel, she crept timidly down the passage to the bathroom, after closing her bedroom door and turning out the light. The gay bathroom cheered her. She wallowed luxuriously in the hot water, regarding her slim legs with quiet satisfaction. And for the first time since leaving home there came to her a pleasant moment, a sense of enjoyment in her adventure. After all, it *was* rather an adventure, and her life had been peculiarly devoid of it. What queer lives some people must live, travelling about, having experiences! How old was she? Not really old—not by any means. Forty-two? Forty-three? She had shut herself up so. She hardly ever regarded the potentialities of age. As the world went, she was a well-preserved woman for her age. A life of self-abnegation, simple living, healthy walking, and fresh air had kept her younger than these hurrying, pampered, city people.

Love? Yes, once when she was a young girl—he was a schoolmaster, a most estimable, kind gentleman. They were never engaged—not actually, but it was a kind of understood thing. For three years it went on, this pleasant understanding and friendship. He was so gentle, so distinguished and considerate. She would have been happy to have continued in this strain for ever. But there was something lacking—Stephen had curious restless lapses. From the physical aspect of marriage she shrank—yes, even with Stephen, who was gentleness and kindness itself. And

then, one day—one day he went away, vanished, and never returned. They told her he had married one of the country girls, a girl who used to work in Mrs. Forbes's dairy—not a very nice girl, she feared, one of those fast, pretty, foolish women. Heigho! Well, she had lived that down, destructive as the blow appeared at the time. One lives everything down in time. There is always work, living for others, faith, duty. At the same time she could sympathise with people who found satisfaction in unusual experiences. There would be lots to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him on the morrow: nearly losing her spectacles on the restaurant-car, the amusing remarks of an American child on the train to Paris, the curious food everywhere, nothing simple and plain; the two English ladies at the hotel in Paris who told her about the death of their uncle—the poor man being taken ill on Friday and dying on Sunday afternoon, just before tea-time; the kindness of the hotel proprietor, who had sat up for her; the prettiness of the chambermaid. Oh, yes, everyone was really very kind. The French people, after all, were very nice. She had seen nothing—nothing but what was quite nice and decorous. There would be lots to tell the dean to-morrow.

Her body glowed with the friction of the towel. She again donned her night attire and her thick woollen dressing-gown. She tidied up the bathroom carefully in exactly the same way she was accustomed to do at home; then once more gripped her sponge-bag and towel, and turning out the light she crept down the passage to her room. Entering the room, she switched on the light and shut the door quickly. Then one of those ridiculous things happened, just the kind of thing you would expect to happen in a foreign hotel. The handle of the door came off in her hand. She ejaculated a quiet "Bother!" and sought to replace it with one hand, the other being occupied with the towel and sponge-bag. In doing this she behaved foolishly, for, thrusting the knob carelessly against the steel pin without properly securing it, she only succeeded in pushing the pin farther into the door, and the knob was not adjusted. She uttered another little "Bother!" and put her sponge-bag and towel down on the floor. She then tried to recover the pin with her left hand, but it had gone in too far.

"How very foolish!" she thought. "I shall have to ring for the chambermaid—and perhaps the poor girl has gone to bed."

She turned and faced the room, and suddenly the awful horror was upon her.

There was a man asleep in her bed!

The sight of that swarthy face on the pillow, with its black tousled hair and heavy moustache, produced in her the most terrible moment of her life. Her heart nearly stopped. For some seconds she could neither think nor scream, and her first thought was:

"I mustn't scream!"

She stood there like one paralysed, staring at the man's head and the great curved hunch of his body under the clothes. When she began to think she thought very quickly and all her thoughts worked together. The first vivid realisation was that it wasn't the man's fault; it was *her* fault. *She was in the wrong room.* It was the man's room. The rooms were identical, but there were all his things about, his clothes thrown carelessly over chairs, his collar and tie on the wardrobe, his great heavy boots and the strange yellow trunk. She must get out—somehow, anyhow. She clutched once more at the door, feverishily driving her fingernails into the hole where the elusive pin had vanished. She tried to force her fingers in the crack and open the door that way, but it was of no avail. She was to all intents and purposes locked in—locked in a bedroom in a strange hotel, alone with a man—a foreigner—a *Frenchman!*

She must think—she must think! She switched off the light. If the light was off he might not wake up. It might give her time to think how to act. It was surprising that he had not awakened. If he *did* wake up, what would he do? How could she explain herself? He wouldn't believe her. No one would believe her. In an English hotel it would be difficult enough, but here, where she wasn't known, where they were all foreigners and consequently antagonistic—merciful heavens!

She *must* get out. Should she wake the man? No, she couldn't do that. He might murder her. He might—oh, it was too awful to contemplate! Should she scream? Ring for the chambermaïd? But no; it would be the same thing. People would come rushing. They would find her there in the strange man's bedroom after midnight—she, Millicent Bracegirdle, sister of the Dean of Easingstoke! Easingstoke! Visions of Easingstoke flashed through her alarmed mind. Visions of the news arriving, women whispering around tea-tables: "Have you heard, my dear? Really no one would have imagined! Her poor brother! He will, of course, have to resign, you know, my dear. Have a little more cream, my love."

Would they put her in prison? She might be in the room for

the purpose of stealing or she might be in the room for the purpose of breaking every one of the ten commandments. There was no explaining it away. She was a ruined woman, suddenly and irretrievably, unless she could open the door. The chimney? Should she climb up the chimney? But where would that lead to? And then she thought of the man pulling her down by the legs when she was already smothered in soot. Any moment he might wake up. She thought she heard the chambermaid going along the passage. If she had wanted to scream, she ought to have screamed before. The maid would know she had left the bathroom some minutes ago. Was she going to her room?

An abrupt and desperate plan formed in her mind. It was already getting on for one o'clock. The man was probably a quite harmless commercial traveller or business man. He would probably get up about seven or eight o'clock, dress quickly, and go out. She would hide under his bed until he went. Only a matter of a few hours. Men don't look under their beds, although she made a religious practice of doing so herself. When he went he would be sure to open the door all right. The handle would be lying on the floor as though it had dropped off in the night. He would probably ring for the chambermaid, or open it with a penknife. Men are so clever at those things. When he had gone she would creep out and steal back to her room, and then there would be no necessity to give any explanation to anyone. But heavens! what an experience! Once under the white frill of that bed, she would be safe until the morning. In daylight nothing seemed so terrifying. With feline precaution she went down on her hands and knees and crept towards the bed. What a lucky thing there was that broad white frill! She lifted it at the foot of the bed and crept under. There was just sufficient depth to take her slim body. The floor was fortunately carpeted all over, but it seemed very close and dusty. Suppose she coughed or sneezed! Anything might happen. Of course, it would be much more difficult to explain her presence under the bed than to explain her presence just inside the door. She held her breath in suspense. No sound came from above, but under the frill it was difficult to hear anything. It was almost more never-racking than hearing everything—listening for signs and portents. This temporary escape, in any case, would give her time to regard the predicament detachedly. Up to the present she had not been able to focus the full significance of her action. She had, in truth, lost her head. She had been like a wild animal, consumed with the sole idea of escape—a mouse

or a cat would do this kind of thing—take cover and lie low. If only it hadn't all happened *abroad!*

She tried to frame sentences of explanation in French, but French escaped her. And then they talked so rapidly, these people. They didn't listen. The situation was intolerable. Would she be able to endure a night of it? At present she was not altogether uncomfortable, only stuffy and—very, very frightened. But she had to face six or seven or eight hours of it, and perhaps even then discovery in the end! The minutes flashed by as she turned the matter over and over in her head. There was no solution. She began to wish she had screamed or awakened the man. She saw now that that would have been the wisest and most politic thing to do; but she had allowed ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to elapse from the moment when the chambermaid would know that she had left the bathroom. They would want an explanation of what she had been doing in the man's bedroom all that time. Why hadn't she screamed before?

She lifted the frill an inch or two and listened. She thought she heard the man breathing, but she couldn't be sure. In any case, it gave her more air. She became a little bolder, and thrust her face partly through the frill so that she could breathe freely. She tried to steady her nerves by concentrating on the fact that—well, there it was. She had done it. She must make the best of it. Perhaps it would be all right, after all.

"Of course, I shan't sleep," she kept on thinking. "I shan't be able to. In any case, it will be safer not to sleep. I must be on the watch."

She set her teeth and waited grimly. Now that she had made up her mind to see the thing through in this manner she felt a little calmer. She almost smiled as she reflected that there would certainly be something to tell the dear dean when she wrote to him to-morrow. How would he take it? Of course he would believe it—he had never doubted a single word that she had uttered in her life—but the story would sound so preposterous. In Easingstoke it would be almost impossible to imagine such an experience. She, Millicent Bracegirdle, spending a night under a strange man's bed in a foreign hotel! What would those women think? Fanny Shields and that garrulous old Mrs. Rusbridger? Perhaps—yes, perhaps it would be advisable to tell the dear dean to let the story go no farther. One could hardly expect Mrs. Rusbridger to not make implications—exaggerate. Oh, dear! what were they all doing now? They would all be asleep, everyone in

Easingstoke. Her dear brother always retired at 10.15. He would be sleeping calmly and placidly, the sleep of the just—breathing the clear sweet air of Sussex, not this—oh, it *was* stuffy! She felt a great desire to cough. She mustn't do that.

Yes, at 9.30 all the servants were summoned to the library. There was a short service—never more than fifteen minutes; her brother didn't believe in a great deal of ritual—then at 10 o'clock cocoa for everyone. At 10.15 bed for everyone. The dear, sweet bedroom, with the narrow white bed, by the side of which she had knelt every night so long as she could remember—even in her dear mother's day—and said her prayers.

Prayers! Yes, that was a curious thing. This was the first night in her life experience when she had not said her prayers on retiring. The situation was certainly very peculiar—exceptional, one might call it. God would understand and forgive such a lapse. And yet, after all, why—what was to prevent her saying her prayers? Of course, she couldn't kneel in the proper devotional attitude, that would be a physical impossibility; nevertheless, perhaps her prayers might be just as efficacious—if they came from the heart.

So little Miss Bracegirdle curved her body and placed her hands in a devout attitude in front of her face, and quite inaudibly murmured her prayers under the strange man's bed.

At the end she added, fervently:

"Please God protect me from the dangers and perils of this night."

Then she lay silent and inert, strangely soothed by the effort of praying.

It began to get very uncomfortable, stuffy, but at the same time draughty, and the floor was getting harder every minute. She changed her position stealthily and controlled her desire to cough. Her heart was beating rapidly. Over and over again recurred the vivid impression of every little incident and argument that had occurred to her from the moment she left the bathroom. This must, of course, be the room next to her own. So confusing, with perhaps twenty bedrooms all exactly alike on one side of a passage—how was one to remember whether one's number was one hundred and fifteen or one hundred and sixteen? Her mind began to wander idly off into her schooldays. She was always very bad at figures. She disliked Euclid and all those subjects about angles and equations—so unimportant, not leading anywhere. History she liked, and botany, and reading about strange foreign

lands, although she had always been too timid to visit them. And the lives of great people, *most* fascinating—Oliver Cromwell, Lord Beaconsfield, Lincoln, Grace Darling—*there* was a heroine for you—General Booth, a great, good man, even if a little vulgar. She remembered dear old Miss Trimmings talking about him one afternoon at the vicar of St. Bride's garden party. She was *so* amusing. She—— *Good heavens!*

Almost unwittingly Millicent Bracegirdle had emitted a violent sneeze!

It was finished! For the second time that night she was conscious of her heart nearly stopping. For the second time that night she was so paralysed with fear that her mentality went to pieces. Now she would hear the man get out of bed. He would walk across to the door, switch on the light, and then lift up the frill. She could almost see that fierce moustachioed face glaring at her and growling something in French. Then he would thrust out an arm and drag her out. And then? O God in Heaven! what then?

"I shall scream before he does it. Perhaps I had better scream now. If he drags me out he will clap his hand over my mouth. Perhaps chloroform——"

But somehow she could not scream. She was too frightened even for that. She lifted the frill and listened. Was he moving stealthily across the carpet? She thought—no, she couldn't be sure. Anything might be happening. He might strike her from above—with one of those heavy boots, perhaps. Nothing seemed to be happening, but the suspense was intolerable. She realised now that she hadn't the power to endure a night of it. Anything would be better than this—disgrace, imprisonment, even death. She would crawl out, wake the man, and try to explain as best she could.

She would switch on the light, cough, and say: "Monsieur!"

Then he would start up and stare her.

Then she would say—what should she say?

"Pardon, monsieur, mais je—— What on earth was the French for 'I have made a mistake'?

"J'ai tort. C'est la chambre—er—incorrect. *Voulez-vous*—er——?"

What was the French for "door-knob," "let me go"?

It didn't matter. She would turn on the light, cough, and trust to luck. If he got out of bed and came towards her, she would scream the hotel down.

The resolution formed, she crawled deliberately out at the foot of the bed. She scrambled hastily towards the door—a perilous journey. In a few seconds the room was flooded with light. She turned towards the bed, coughed, and cried out boldly:

"Monsieur!"

Then for the third time that night little Miss Bracegirdle's heart all but stopped. In this case the climax of the horror took longer to develop, but when it was reached it clouded the other two experiences into insignificance.

The man on the bed was dead!

She had never beheld death before, but one does not mistake death.

She stared at him, bewildered, and repeated almost in a whisper:

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

Then she tip-toed towards the bed. The hair and moustache looked extraordinarily black in that grey, wax-like setting. The mouth was slightly open, and the face, which in life might have been vicious and sensual, looked incredibly peaceful and far away. It was as though she were regarding the features of a man across some vast passage of time, a being who had always been completely remote from mundane preoccupations.

When the full truth came home to her, little Miss Bracegirdle buried her face in her hands and murmured:

"Poor fellow—poor fellow!"

For the moment her own position seemed an affair of small consequence. She was in the presence of something greater and more all-pervading. Almost instinctively she knelt by the bed and prayed.

For a few moments she seemed to be possessed by an extraordinary calmness and detachment. The burden of her hotel predicament was a gossamer trouble—a silly, trivial, almost comic episode, something that could be explained away.

But this man—he had lived his life, whatever it was like, and now he was in the presence of his Maker. What kind of man had he been?

Her meditations were broken by an abrupt sound. It was that of a pair of heavy boots being thrown down by the door outside. She started, thinking at first it was someone knocking or trying to get in. She heard the "boots," however, stumping away down the corridor, and the realisation stabbed her with the truth of her

own position. She mustn't stop there. The necessity to get out was even more urgent.

To be found in a strange man's bedroom in the night is bad enough, but to be found in a dead man's bedroom was even worse. They would accuse her of murder, perhaps. Yes, that would be it—how could she possibly explain to these foreigners? Good God! they would hang her. No, guillotine her—that's what they do in France. They would chop her head off with a great steel knife. Merciful heavens! She envisaged herself standing blindfold, by a priest and an executioner in a red cap, like that man in the Dickens story. What was his name?—Sydney Carton, that was it. And before he went on the scaffold he said:

"It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done——"

But no, she couldn't say that. It would be a far, far worse thing that she did. What about the dear dean; her sister-in-law arriving alone from Paraguay to-morrow; all her dear people and friends in Easingstoke; her darling Tony, the large grey tabby-cat? It was her duty not to have her head chopped off if it could possibly be avoided. She could do no good in the room. She could not recall the dead to life. Her only mission was to escape. Any minute people might arrive. The chambermaid, the boots, the manager, the gendarmes. Visions of gendarmes arriving armed with swords and notebooks vitalised her almost exhausted energies. She was a desperate woman. Fortunately now she had not to worry about the light. She sprang once more at the door and tried to force it open with her fingers. The result hurt her and gave her pause. If she was to escape she must *think,* and think intensely. She mustn't do anything rash and silly; she must just think and plan calmly.

She examined the lock carefully. There was no keyhole, but there was a slip-bolt, so that the hotel guest could lock the door on the inside, but it couldn't be locked on the outside. Oh, why didn't this poor dear dead man lock his door last night? Then this trouble could not have happened. She could see the end of the steel pin. It was about half an inch down the hole. If anyone was passing they must surely notice the handle sticking out too far the other side! She drew a hairpin out of her hair and tried to coax the pin back, but she only succeeded in pushing it a little farther in. She felt the colour leaving her face, and a strange feeling of faintness came over her.

She was fighting for her life; she mustn't give way. She darted round the room like an animal in a trap, her mind alert for the

slightest crevice of escape. The window had no balcony, and there was a drop of five storeys to the street below. Dawn was breaking. Soon the activities of the hotel and the city would begin. The thing must be accomplished before then.

She went back once more and stared hard at the lock. She stared at the dead man's property, his razors and brushes and writing materials. He appeared to have a lot of writing materials, pens and pencils and rubber and sealing-wax. Sealing-wax!

Necessity is truly the mother of invention. It is in any case quite certain that Millicent Bracegirdle, who had never invented a thing in her life, would never have evolved the ingenious little device she did, had she not believed that her position was utterly desperate. For in the end this is what she did. She got together a box of matches, a candle, a bar of sealing-wax, and a hairpin. She made a little pool of hot sealing-wax, into which she dipped the end of the hairpin, Collecting a small blob on the end of it, she thrust it into the hole, and let it adhere to the end of the steel pin. At the seventh attempt she got the thing to move.

It took her just an hour and ten minutes to get that steel pin back into the room, and when at length it came far enough through for her to grip it with her finger-nails, she burst into tears through the sheer physical tenseness of the strain. Very, very carefully she pulled it through, and holding it firmly with her left had she fixed the knob with her right, then slowly turned it.

The door opened!

The temptation to dash out into the corridor and scream with relief was almost irresistible, but she forebore. She listened. She peeped out. No one was about. With beating heart she went out, closing the door inaudibly; she crept like a little mouse to the room next door, stole in, and flung herself on the bed. Immediately she did so, it flashed through her mind that *she had left her sponge-bag and towel in the dead man's room!*

In looking back upon her experience she always considered that that second expedition was the worst of all. She might have let the sponge-bag and towel remain there, only that the towel —she never used hotel towels—had neatly inscribed in the corner "M. B."

With furtive caution she managed to retrace her steps. She re-entered the dead man's room, reclaimed her property, and returned to her own. When the mission was accomplished she was indeed well-nigh spent. She lay on her bed and groaned feebly. At last she fell into a fevered sleep.

It was eleven o'clock when she awoke, and no one had been to disturb her. The sun was shining, and the experiences of the night appeared a dubious nightmare. Surely she had dreamt it all?

With dread still burning in her heart she rang the bell. After a short interval of time the chambermaid appeared. The girl's eyes were bright with some uncontrollable excitement. No, she had not been dreaming. This girl had heard something.

"Will you bring me some tea, please?"

"Certainly, madame."

The maid drew back the curtains and fussed about the room. She was under a pledge of secrecy, but she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she approached the bed and whispered, excitedly:

"Oh, madame, I am promised not to tell—but a terrible thing has happened! A man, a dead man, has been found in room one hundred and seventeen—a guest! Please not to say I tell you. But they have all been here—the gendarmes, the doctors, the inspectors. Oh, it is terrible—terrible!"

The little lady in the bed said nothing. There was indeed nothing to say. But Marie Louise Lancret was too full of emotional excitement to spare her.

"But the terrible thing is—— Do you know who he was, madame? They say it is Boldhu, the man wanted for the murder of Jeanne Carreton in the barn at Vincennes. They say he strangled her, and then cut her up in pieces and hid her in two barrels, which he threw into the river. Oh, but he was a bad man, madame, a terrible bad man—and he died in the room next door. Suicide, they think; or was it an attack of the heart? Remorse; some shock, perhaps. Did you say a *café complet,* madame?"

"No, thank you, my dear—just a cup of tea—strong tea."

"Parfaitement, madame."

The girl retired, and a little later a waiter entered the room with a tray of tea. She could never get over her surprise at this. It seemed so—well, indecorous for a man—although only a waiter—to enter a lady's bedroom. There was, no doubt, a great deal in what the dear dean said. They were certainly very peculiar, these French people—they had most peculiar notions. It was not the way they behaved at Easingtsoke. She got farther under the sheets, but the waiter appeared quite indifferent to the situation. He put the tray down and retired.

When he had gone, she sat up and sipped her tea, which gradually warmed her. She was glad the sun was shining. She

would have to get up soon. They said that her sister-in-law's boat was due to berth at one o'clock. That would give her time to dress comfortably, write to her brother, and then go down to the docks.

Poor man! So he had been a murderer, a man who cut up the bodies of his victims—and she had spent the night in his bedroom! They were certainly a most—how could she describe it?—people. Nevertheless she felt a little glad that at the end she had been there to kneel and pray by his bedside. Probably nobody else had ever done that. It was very difficult to judge people. Something at some time might have gone wrong. He might not have murdered the woman after all. People were often wrongly convicted. She herself. If the police had found her in that room at three o'clock that morning—— It is that which takes place in the heart which counts. One learns and learns. Had she not learnt that one can pray just as effectively lying under a bed as kneeling beside it? Poor man!

She washed and dressed herself and walked calmly down to the writing-room. There was no evidence of excitement among the other hotel guests. Probably none of them knew about the tragedy except herself. She went to a writing-table, and after profound meditation wrote as follows:

"My dear Brother,—I arrived late last night, after a very pleasant journey. Everyone was very kind and attentive, the manager was sitting up for me. I nearly lost my spectacles in the restaurant-car, but a kind old gentleman found them and returned them to me. There was a most amusing American child on the train. I will tell you about her on my return. The people are very pleasant, but the food is peculiar, nothing plain and wholesome. I am going down to meet Annie at one o'clock. How have you been keeping, my dear? I hope you have not had any further return of the bronchial attacks. Please tell Lizzie that I remembered in the train on the way here that that large stone jar of marmalade that Mrs. Hunt made is behind those empty tins on the top shelf of the cupboard next to the coachhouse. I wonder whether Mrs. Buller was able to come to even-song after all? This is a nice hotel, but I think Annie and I will stay at the Grand to-night, as the bedrooms here are rather noisy. Well, my dear, nothing more till I return. Do take care of yourself.

"Your loving sister,
"Millicent."

Yes, she couldn't tell Peter about it, neither in the letter nor when she went back to him. It was her duty not to tell him. It would only distress him: she felt convinced of it. In this curious foreign atmosphere the thing appeared possible, but in Easingstoke the mere recounting of the fantastic situation would be positively indelicate. There was no escaping that broad general fact—she had spent a night in a strange man's bedroom. Whether he was a gentleman or a criminal, even whether he was dead or alive, did not seem to mitigate the jar upon her sensibilities, or, rather, it would not mitigate the jar upon the peculiarly sensitive relationship between her brother and herself. To say that she had been to the bathroom, the knob of the door-handle came off in her hand, she was too frightened to awaken the sleeper or scream, she got under the bed—well, it was all perfectly true. Peter would believe her, but—one simply could not conceive such a situation in Easingstoke deanery. It would create a curious little barrier between them, as though she had been dipped in some mysterious solution which alienated her. It was her duty not to tell.

She put on her hat and went out to post the letter. She distrusted an hotel letter-box. One never knew who handled these letters. It was not a proper official way of treating them. She walked to the head post-office in Bordeaux.

The sun was shining. It was very pleasant walking about amongst these queer, excitable people, so foreign and different looking—and the *cafés* already crowded with chattering men and women; and the flower stalls, and the strange odour of—what was it? salt? brine? charcoal? A military band was playing in the square—very gay and moving. It was all life, and movement, and bustle—thrilling rather.

"I spent a night in a strange man's bedroom."

Little Miss Bracegirdle hunched her shoulders, hummed to herself, and walked faster. She reached the post-office, and found the large metal plate with the slot for letters and R.F. stamped above it. Something official at last! Her face was a little flushed —was it the warmth of the day, or the contact of movement and life?—as she put her letter into the slot. After posting it she put her hand into the slot and flicked it round to see that there were no foreign contraptions to impede its safe delivery. No, the letter had dropped safely in. She sighed contentedly, and walked off in the direction of the docks to meet her sister-in-law from Paraguay.

R. H. Barham

THE LEECH OF FOLKESTONE

From *The Ingoldsby Legends.*

Reader, were you ever bewitched?—I do not mean by a "white wench's black eye," or by love-potions imbibed from a ruby lip;—but, were you ever really and *bonâ fide* betwitched, in the true Matthew Hopkins' sense of the word? Did you ever, for instance, find yourself from head to heel one vast complication of cramps?—or burst out into sudorific exudation like a cold thaw, with the thermometer at zero? Were your eyes ever turned upside down, exhibiting nothing but their whites?—Did you ever vomit a paper of crooked pins? or expectorate Whitechapel needles? These are genuine and undoubted marks of possession; and if you never experienced any of them,—why, "happy man be his dole!"

Yet such things have been: yea, we are assured, and that on no mean authority, still are.

The World, according to the best geographers, is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh. In this last-named, and fifth, quarter of the globe, a Witch may still be occasionally discovered in favourable, *i.e.,* stormy, seasons, weathering Dungeness Point in an eggshell, or careering on her broomstick over Dymchurch wall. A cow may yet be sometimes seen galloping like mad, with tail erect, and an old pair of breeches on her horns, an unerring guide to the door of the crone whose magic arts have drained her udder. I do not, however, remember to have heard that any Conjurer has of late been detected in the district.

Not many miles removed from the verge of this recondite region, stands a collection of houses, which its maligners call a fishingtown and its well-wishers a Watering-place. A limb of one of the Cinque Ports, it has (or lately had) a corporation of its own, and has been thought considerable enough to give a second title to a noble family. Rome stood on seven hills; Folkestone seems to have been built upon seventy. Its streets, lanes, and alleys—fanciful distinctions without much real difference,—are agreeable enough to persons who do not mind running up and down stairs; and the only inconvenience at all felt by such of its inhabitants as are not asthmatic, is when some heedless urchin tumbles down a chimney, or an impertinent pedestrian peeps into a garret window.

At the eastern extremity of the town, on the sea-beach, and scarcely above high-water mark, stood, in the good old times, a row of houses then denominated "Frog-hole." Modern refinement subsequently euphonised the name into "East-street"; but "what's in a name?" the encroachments of Ocean have long since levelled all in one common ruin.

Here, in the early part of the seventeenth century, flourished in somewhat doubtful reputation, but comparative opulence, a compounder of medicines, one Master Erasmus Buckthorne; the effluvia of whose drugs from within, mingling agreeably with the "ancient and fish-like smells" from without, wafted a delicious perfume throughout the neighbourhood.

At seven of the clock, on the morning when Mrs. Botherby's narrative commences, a stout Suffolk "punch," about thirteen hands and a half in height, was slowly led up and down before the door of the pharmacopolist by a lean and withered lad, whose appearance warranted an opinion, pretty generally expressed, that his master found him as useful in experimentalising as in household drudgery; and that, for every pound avoirdupois of solid meat, he swallowed, at the least, two pounds troy weight of chemicals and galenicals. As the town clock struck the quarter, Master Buckthorne emerged from his laboratory, and, putting the key carefully into his pocket, mounted the sure-footed cob aforesaid, and proceeded up and down the acclivities and declivities of the town with the gravity due to his station and profession. When he reached the open country, his pace was increased to a sedate canter, which, in somewhat more than half an hour, brought "the horse and his rider" in front of a handsome and substantial mansion, the numerous gable-ends and bayed windows of which bespoke the owner a man of worship, and one well to do in the world.

"How now, Hodge Gardener?" quoth the Leech, scarcely drawing bit; for Punch seemed to be aware that he had reached his destination, and paused of his own accord; "How now, man? How fares thine employer, worthy Master Marsh? How hath he done? How hath he slept? My potion hath done its office? Ha!"

"Alack! ill at ease, worthy sir, ill at ease," returned the hind; "his honour is up and stirring; but he hath rested none, and complaineth that the same gnawing pain devoureth, as it were, his very vitals: in sooth he is ill at ease."

"Morrow, doctor!" interrupted a voice from a casement open-

ing on the lawn. "Good morrow! I have looked for, longed for, thy coming this hour and more; enter at once; the pastry and tankard are impatient for thine attack!"

"Marry, Heaven forbid that I should baulk their fancy!" quoth the Leech *sotto voce,* as, abandoning the bridle to honest Hodge, he dismounted, and followed a buxom-looking hand-maiden into the breakfast parlour.

There, at the head of his well-furnished board, sat Master Thomas Marsh, of Marston-hall, a yeoman well respected in his degree: one of that sturdy and sterling class which, taking rank immediately below the Esquire, (a title in its origin purely military), occupied, in the wealthier counties, the position in society now filled by the Country Gentlemen. He was one of those of whom the proverb ran:

A Knight of Cales,
A Gentleman of Wales,
And a Laird of the North Countree
A Yeoman of Kent,
With his yearly rent,
Will buy them out all three!

A cold sirloin, big enough to frighten a Frenchman, filled the place of honour, counter-checked by a game-pie of no stinted dimensions; while a silver flagon of "humming-bub,"—viz. ale strong enough to blow a man's beaver off—smiled opposite in treacherous amenity. The sideboard groaned beneath sundry massive cups and waiters of the purest silver; while the huge skull of a fallow deer, with its branching horns, frowned majestically above. All spoke of affluence, of comfort,—all save the master, whose restless eye and feverish look hinted but too plainly the severest mental or bodily disorder. By the side of the proprietor of the mansion sat his consort, a lady now past the bloom of youth, yet still retaining many of its charms. The clear olive of her complexion, and "the darkness of her Andalusian eye," at once betrayed her foreign origin; in fact, her "lord and master," as husbands were even then, by a legal fiction, denominated, had taken her to his bosom in a foreign country. The cadet of his family, Master Thomas Marsh had early in life been engaged in commerce. In the pursuit of his vocation he had visited Antwerp, Hamburg, and most of the Hanse Towns; and had already formed a tender connexion with the orphan offspring of one of old Alva's officers, when the unexpected deaths of one immediate,

and two presumptive, heirs placed him next in succession to the family acres. He married, and brought home his bride: who, by the decease of the venerable possessor, heart-broken at the loss of his elder children, became eventually lady of Marston-hall. It has been said that she was beautiful, yet was her beauty of a character that operates on the fancy more than the affections; she was one to be admired rather than loved. The proud curl of her lip, the firmness of her tread, her arched brow and stately carriage, showed the decision, not to say haughtiness, of her soul; while her glances, whether lightening with anger, or melting in extreme softness, betrayed the existence of passions as intense in kind as opposite in quality. She rose as Erasmus entered the parlour, and, bestowing on him a look fraught with meaning, quitted the room, leaving him in unrestrained communication with his patient.

" 'Fore George, Master Buckthorne!" exclaimed the latter, as the Leech drew near. "I will no more of your pharmacy;—burn, burn, gnaw, gnaw,—I had as lief the foul fiend were in my gizzard as one of your drugs. Tell me, in the devil's name, what is the matter with me!"

Thus conjured, the practitioner paused, and even turned somewhat pale. There was a perceptible faltering in his voice, as evading the question, he asked, "What say your other physicians?"

"Doctor Phiz says it is wind,—Doctor Fuz says it is water,—and Doctor Bux says it is something between wind and water."

"They are all of them wrong," said Erasmus Buckthorne.

"Truly, I think so," returned the patient. "They are manifest asses; but you, good Leech, you are a horse of another colour. The world talks loudly of your learning, your skill, and cunning in arts the most abstruse; nay, sooth to say, some look coldly on you therefore, and stickle not to aver that you are cater-cousin with Beelzebub himself."

"It is ever the fate of science," murmured the professor, "to be maligned by the ignorant and superstitious. But a truce with such folly; let me examine your palate."

Master Marsh thrust out a tongue long, clear, and red as a beetroot. "There is nothing wrong there," said the Leech. "Your wrist:—no;—the pulse is firm and regular, the skin cool and temperate. Sir, there is nothing the matter with you!"

"Nothing the matter with me, Sir 'Potecary?—But I tell you there is the matter with me,—much the matter with me. Why is

it that something seems ever gnawing at my heart-strings?—Whence this pain in the region of the liver?—Why is it that I sleep not o' nights,—rest not o' days? Why——"

"You are fidgety, Master Marsh," said the doctor.

Master Marsh's brow grew dark: he half rose from his seat, supported himself by both hands on the arms of his elbow chair, and in accents of mingled anger and astonishment repeated the word "Fidgety!"

"Ay, fidgety," returned the doctor, calmly. "Tut, man, there is nought ails thee save thine own overweening fancies. Take less of food, more air, put aside thy flagon, call for thy horse; be boot and saddle the word! Why, hast thou not youth?——"

"I have," said the patient.

"Wealth and a fair domain?"

"Granted," quoth Marsh, cheerily.

"And a fair wife?"

"Yea," was the response, but in a tone something less satisfied.

"Then arouse thee, man, shake off this fantasy, betake thyself to thy lawful occasions—use thy good hap,—follow thy pleasures and think no more of these fancied ailments."

"But I tell you, master mine, these ailments are not fancied. I lose my rest, I loathe my food, my doublet sits loosely on me,—these racking pains. My wife, too, when I meet her gaze, the cold sweat stands on my forehead, and I could almost think——." Marsh paused abruptly, mused a while, then added, looking steadily at his visitor, "These things are not right; they pass the common, Master Erasmus Buckthorne."

A slight shade crossed the brow of the Leech, but its passage was momentary; his features softened to a smile, in which pity seemed slightly blended with contempt. "Have done with such follies, Master Marsh. You are well, an you would but think so. Ride, I say, hunt, shoot, do anything,—disperse these melancholic humours, and become yourself again."

"Well, I will do your bidding," said Marsh, thoughtfully. "It may be so; and yet,—but I will do your bidding. Master Cobb of Brenzet writes me that he hath a score or two of fat ewes to be sold a pennyworth; I had thought to have sent Ralph Looker, but I will essay to go myself. Ho, there!—saddle me the brown mare, and bid Ralph be ready to attend me on the gelding."

An expression of pain contracted the features of Master Marsh as he rose and slowly quitted the apartment to prepare for his journey! while the Leech, having bidden him farewell, vanished

through an opposite door, and betook himself to the private boudoir of the fair mistress of Marston, muttering as he went a quotation from a then newly-published play,

"Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou own'dst yesterday."

. . . . . .

Of what passed at this interview between the Folkestone doctor and the fair Spaniard, Mrs. Botherby declares she could never obtain any satisfactory elucidation. Not that tradition is silent on the subject,—quite the contrary; it is the abundance, no paucity, of the materials she supplies, and the consequent embarrassment of selection, that makes the difficulty. Some have averred that the Leech, whose character, as has been before hinted, was more than threadbare, employed his time in teaching her the mode of administering certain noxious compounds, the unconscious partaker whereof would pine and die so slowly and gradually as to defy suspicion. Others there were who affirmed that Lucifer himself was then and there raised *in propriâ personâ,* with all his terrible attributes of horn and hoof. In support of this assertion, they adduce the testimony of the aforesaid buxom housemaid, who protested that the Hall smelt that evening like a manufactory of matches. All, however, seemed to agree that the confabulation, whether human or infernal, was conducted with profound secrecy, and protracted to a considerable length; that its object, as far as could be divined, meant anything but good to the head of the family; that the lady, moreover, was heartily tired of her husband; and that, in the event of his removal by disease or casualty, Master Erasmus Buckthorne, albeit a great philosophist, would have no violent objection to "throw physic to the dogs," and exchange his laboratory for the estate of Marston, its live stock included. Some, too, have inferred that to him did Madame Isabel seriously incline; while others have thought, induced perhaps by subsequent events, that she was merely using him for her purposes; that one José, a tall, bright-eyed, hook-nosed stripling from her native land, was a personage not unlikely to put a spoke in the doctor's wheel; and that, should such a chance arise, the Sage, wise as he was, would, after all, run no slight risk of being "bamboozled."

Master José was a youth well-favoured, and comely to look

upon. His office was that of page to the dame; an office which, after long remaining in abeyance, has been of late years revived, as may well be seen in the persons of sundry smart hobbledehoys, now constantly to be met with on staircases and in boudoirs, clad, for the most part, in garments fitted tightly to the shape, the lower moiety adorned with a broad stripe of crimson or silver lace, and the upper with what the first Wit of our times has described as "a favourable eruption of buttons." The precise duties of this employment have never, as far as we have heard, been accurately defined. The perfuming a handkerchief, the combing a lap-dog, and the occasional presentation of a sippet-shaped *billet doux,* are, and always have been, among them; but these a young gentleman standing five foot ten, and aged nineteen "last grass," might well be supposed to have outgrown. José, however, kept his place, perhaps because he was not fit for any other. To the conference between his mistress and the physician he had not been admitted; his post was to keep watch and ward in the ante-room; and, when the interview was concluded, he attended the lady and her visitor as far as the court-yard, where he held, with all due respect, the stirrup for the latter, as he once more resumed his position on the back of Punch.

Who is it that says, "little pitchers have large ears"? Some deep metaphysician of the potteries, who might have added that they have also quick eyes, and sometimes silent tongues. There was a little metaphorical piece of crockery of this class, who, screened by a huge elbow-chair, had sat a quiet and unobserved spectator of the whole proceedings between her mamma and Master Erasmus Buckthorne. This was Miss Marian Marsh, a rosy-cheeked laughter-loving imp of some six years old; but one who could be mute as a mouse when the fit was on her. A handsome and highly-polished cabinet of the darkest ebony occupied a recess at one end of the apartment; this had long been a great subject of speculation to little Miss. Her curiosity, however, had always been repelled; nor had all her coaxing even won her an inspection of the thousand and one pretty things which its recesses no doubt contained. On this occasion it was unlocked, and Marian was about to rush forward in eager anticipation of a peep at its interior, when, child as she was, the reflection struck her that she would stand a better chance of carrying her point by remaining *perdue.* Fortune for once favoured her: she crouched closer than before, and saw her mother take something from one of the drawers, which she handed over to the Leech. Strange mutter-

ings followed, and words whose sound was foreign to her youthful ears. Had she been older, their import, perhaps, might have been equally unknown. After a while there was a pause; and then the lady, as in answer to a requisition from the gentleman, placed in his hand a something which she took from her toilet. The transaction, whatever its nature, seemed now to be complete, and the article was carefully replaced in the drawer from which it had been taken. A long, and apparently interesting, conversation then took place between the parties, carried on in a low tone. At its termination, Mistress Marsh and Master Erasmus Buckthorne quitted the boudoir together. But the cabinet!—ay, that was left unfastened; the folding-doors still remained invitingly expanded, the bunch of keys dangling from the lock. In an instant the spoiled child was in a chair; the drawer so recently closed, yielded at once to her hand, and her hurried researches were rewarded by the prettiest little waxen doll imaginable. It was a first-rate prize, and Miss lost no time in appropriating it to herself. Long before Madame Marsh had returned to her *Sanctum,* Marian was seated under a laurestinus in the garden, nursing her new baby with the most affectionate solicitude.

"Susan, look here; see what a nasty scratch I have got upon my hand," said the young lady, when routed out at length from her hiding-place to her noontide meal.

"Yes, Miss, this is always the way with you! mend, mend, mend—nothing but mend! Scrambling about among the bushes, and tearing your clothes to rags. What with you, and with madam's farthingales and kirtles, a poor bower-maiden has a fine time of it!"

"But I have not torn my clothes, Susan, and it was not the bushes; it was the doll: only see what a great ugly pin I have pulled out of it! and look, here is another!" As she spoke, Marian drew forth one of those extended pieces of black pointed wire, with which, in the days of toupees and pompoons, our foremothers were wont to secure their fly-caps and head-gear from the impertinent assaults of "Zephyrus and the Little Breezes."

"And pray, Miss, where did you get this pretty doll, as you call it?" asked Susan, turning over the puppet, and viewing it with a scrutinising eye.

"Mamma gave it to me," said the child.—This was a fib!

"Indeed!" quoth the girl thoughtfully; and then, in half soliloquy, and a lower key, "Well! I wish I may die if it doesn't

look like master!—But come to your dinner, Miss! Hark! the *bell is striking One!*"

Meanwhile Master Thomas Marsh, and his man Ralph, were threading the devious paths, then, as now, most pseudonymously dignified with the name of roads, that wound between Marston Hall and the frontier of Romney Marsh. Their progress was comparatively slow; for though the brown mare was as good a roadster as man might back, and the gelding no mean nag of his hands, yet the tracts, rarely traversed save by the rude wains of the day, miry in the "bottoms," and covered with loose and rolling stones on the higher grounds, rendered barely passable the perpetual alternation of hill and valley.

The master rode on in pain, and the man in listlessness; although the intercourse between two individuals so situated was much less restrained in those days than might suit the refinement of a later age, little passed approximating to conversation beyond an occasional and half-stifled groan from the one, or a vacant whistle from the other. An hour's riding had brought them among the woods of Acryse; and they were about to descend one of those green and leafy lanes, rendered by matted and overarching branches alike impervious to shower or sunbeam, when a sudden and violent spasm seized on Master Marsh, and nearly caused him to fall from his horse. With some difficulty he succeeded in dismounting, and seating himself by the road side. Here he remained for a full half-hour in great apparent agony; the cold sweat rolled in large round drops adown his clammy forehead, a universal shivering palsied every limb, his eye-balls appeared to be starting from their sockets, and to his attached, though dull and heavy serving-man, he seemed as one struggling in the pangs of impending dissolution. His groans rose thick and frequent; and the alarmed Ralph was hesitating between his disinclination to leave him, and his desire to procure such assistance as one of the few cottages, rarely sprinkled in that wild country, might afford, when, after a long-drawn sigh, his master's features as suddenly relaxed; he declared himself better, the pang had passed away, and, to use his own expression, he "felt as if a knife had been drawn from out his very heart." With Ralph's assistance, after a while, he again reached his saddle; and though still ill at ease, from a deep-seated and gnawing pain, which ceased not, as he averred, to torment him, the violence of the paroxysm was spent, and it returned no more.

Master and man pursued their way with increased speed, as emerging from the wooded defiles, they at length neared the coast; then, leaving the romantic castle of Saltwood, with its neighbouring town of Hithe, a little on their left, they proceeded along the ancient paved causeway, and, crossing the old Roman road, or Watling, plunged again into the woods that stretched between Lympne and Ostenhanger.

The sun rode high in the heavens, and its meridian blaze was powerfully felt by man and horse, when, again quitting their leafy covert, the travellers debouched on the open plain of Aldington Frith, a wide tract of unenclosed country stretching down to the very borders of "the Marsh" itself.

Here it was, in the neighbouring chapelry, the site of which may yet be traced by the curious antiquary, that Elizabeth Barton, the "Holy Maid of Kent," had, something less than a hundred years previous to the period of our narrative, commenced that series of supernatural pranks which eventually procured for her head an unenvied elevation upon London Bridge; and though the parish had since enjoyed the benefit of the incumbency of Master Erasmus's illustrious and enlightened Namesake, still, truth to tell, some of the old leaven was even yet supposed to be at work. The place had, in fact, an ill name; and, though Popish miracles had ceased to electrify its denizens, spells and charms, operating by a no less wondrous agency, were said to have taken their place. Warlocks, and other unholy subjects of Satan, were reported to make its wild recesses their favourite rendezvous, and that to an extent which eventually attracted the notice of no less a person than the sagacious Matthew Hopkins himself, Witch-finder-General to the British Government.

A great portion of the Frith, or Fright, as the name was then, and is still, pronounced, had formerly been a Chase, with rights of Free-warren, &c., appertaining to the Archbishops of the Province. Since the Reformation, however, it had been disparked; and when Master Thomas Marsh, and his man Ralph, entered upon its confines, the open greensward exhibited a lively scene, sufficiently explanatory of certain sounds that had already reached their ears while yet within the sylvan screen that concealed their origin.

It was Fair-day: booths, stalls, and all the rude *paraphernalia* of an assembly that then met as much for the purposes of traffic as festivity, were scattered irregularly over the turf; pedlars with their packs, horse-croupers, pig-merchants, itinerant vendors of

crockery and cutlery, wandered promiscuously among the mingled groups, exposing their several wares and commodities, and soliciting custom. On one side was the gaudy riband, making its mute appeal to rustic gallantry; on the other the delicious brandy-ball and alluring lollipop, compounded after the most approved receipt in the "True Gentlewoman's Garland," and "raising the waters" in the mouth of many an expectant urchin.

Nor were rural sports wanting to those whom pleasure, rather than business, had drawn from their humble homes. Here was the tall and slippery pole, glittering in its grease, and crowned with the ample cheese, that mocked the hopes of the discomfited climber. There the fugitive pippin, swimming in water not of the purest, and bobbing from the expanded lips of the juvenile Tantalus. In this quarter the ear was pierced by squeaks from some beleagured porker, whisking his well-soaped tail from the grasp of one already in fancy his captor. In that, the eye rested, with undisguised delight, upon the grimaces of grinning candidates for the honours of the horse-collar. All was fun, frolic, courtship, junketing, and jollity.

Maid Marian, indeed, with her lieges, Robin Hood, Scarlet, and Little John, was wanting; Friar Tuck was absent; even the Hobbyhorse had disappeared: but the agile Morris-dancers yet were there, and jingled their bells merrily among stalls well stored with ginger-bread, tops, whips, whistles, and all those noisy instruments of domestic torture in which scenes like these are even now so fertile.—Had I a foe whom I held at deadliest feud, I would entice his favourite child to a Fair, and buy him a Whistle and a Penny-trumpet.

In one corner of the green, a little apart from the thickest of the throng, stood a small square stage, nearly level with the chins of the spectators, whose repeated bursts of laughter seemed to intimate the presence of something more than usually amusing. The platform was divided into two unequal portions; the smaller of which, surrounded by curtains of a coarse canvas, veiled from the eyes of the profane the *penetralia* of this movable temple of Esculapius, for such it was. Within its interior, and secure from vulgar curiosity, the Quack-salver had hitherto kept himself ensconced; occupied, no doubt, in the preparation and arrangement of that wonderful *panacea* which was hereafter to shed the blessings of health among the admiring crowd. Meanwhile his attendant Jack-pudding was busily employed on the *proscenium*, doing his best to attract attention by a practical facetiousness

which took wonderfully with the spectators, interspersing it with the melodious notes of a huge cow's horn. The fellow's costume varied but little in character from that in which the late (alas that we should have to write the word—late!) Mr. Joseph Grimaldi was accustomed to present himself before "a generous and enlightened public"; the principal difference consisted in this, that the upper garment was a long white tunic of a coarse linen, surmounted by a caricature of the ruff then fast falling into disuse, and was secured from the throat downwards by a single row of broad white metal buttons; and his legs were cased in loose wide trousers of the same material; while his sleeves, prolonged to a most disproportionate extent, descended far below the fingers, and acted as flappers in the somersets and caracoles, with which he diversified and enlivened his antics. Consummate impudence, not altogether unmixed with a certain sly humour, sparkled in his eye through the chalk and ochre with which his features were plentifully bedaubed; and especially displayed itself in a succession of jokes, the coarseness of which did not seem to detract from their merit in the eyes of his applauding audience.

He was in the midst of a long and animated harangue explanatory of his master's high pretensions; he had informed his gaping auditors that the latter was the seventh son of a seventh son, and of course, as they very well knew, an Unborn Doctor; that to this happy accident of birth he added the advantage of most extensive travel; that in his search after science he had not only perambulated the whole of this world, but had trespassed on the boundaries of the next; that the depths of the Ocean and the bowels of the Earth were alike familiar to him; that besides salves and cataplasms of sovereign virtue, by combining sundry mosses, gathered many thousand fathoms below the surface of the sea, with certain unknown drugs found in an undiscovered island, and boiling the whole in the lava of Vesuvius, he had succeeded in producing his celebrated balsam of Crackapanoko, the never-failing remedy for all human disorders, and which, a proper trial allowed, would go near to reanimate the dead. "Draw near!" continued the worthy, "draw near, my masters! and you, my good mistresses, draw near, every one of you. Fear not high and haughty carriage: though greater than King or Kaiser, yet is the mighty Aldrovando milder than mother's milk; flint to the proud, to the humble he is as melting wax; he asks not your disorders, he sees them himself at a glance—nay, without a glance; he tells your ailments with his eyes shut!—Draw

near! draw near! the more incurable the better! List to the illustrious Doctor Aldrovando, first physician to Prester John, Leech to the Grand Llama, and Hakim in Ordinary to Mustapha Muley Bey!"

"Hath your master ever a charm for the toothache, an't please you?" asked an elderly countryman, whose swollen cheek bespoke his interest in the question.

"A charm!—a thousand, and every one of them infallible. Toothache, quotha! I had hoped you had come with every bone in your body fractured or out of joint. A toothache!—propound a tester, master o' mine—we ask not more for such trifles: do my bidding and thy jaws, even with the word, shall cease to trouble thee!"

The clown, fumbling a while in a deep leathern purse, at length produced a sixpence, which he tendered to the jester. "Now to thy master, and bring me the charm forthwith."

"Nay, honest man; to disturb the mighty Aldrovando on such slight occasion were pity of my life: areed my counsel aright, and I will warrant thee for the nonce. Hie thee home, friend; infuse this powder in cold spring-water, fill thy mouth with the mixture, and sit upon thy fire till it boils!"

"Out on thee for a pestilent knave!" cried the cozened countryman; but the roar of merriment around bespoke the bystanders well-pleased with the jape put upon him. He retired, venting his spleen in audible murmurs; and the mountebank, finding the feelings of the mob enlisted on his side, waxed more impudent every instant, filling up the intervals between his fooleries with sundry capers and contortions and discordant notes from the cow's horn.

"Draw near, draw near, my masters! Here have ye a remedy for every evil under the sun, moral, physical, natural, and supernatural! Hath any man a termagant wife?—here is that will tame her presently! Hath any one a smoky chimney?—Here is an incontinent cure!"

To the first infliction no man ventured to plead guilty, though there were those standing by who thought their neighbours might have profited withal. For the last-named recipe started forth at least half a dozen candidates. With the greatest gravity imaginable, Pierrot, having pocketed their groats, delivered to each a small packet curiously folded and closely sealed, containing, as he averred, directions which, if truly observed, would preclude any chimney from smoking for a whole year. They whose curiosity

led them to dive into the mystery, found that a sprig of mountain ash culled by moonlight was the charm recommended, coupled, however, with the proviso that no fire should be lighted on the hearth during its exercise.

The frequent bursts of merriment proceeding from this quarter at length attracted the attention of Master Marsh, whose line of road necessarily brought him near this end of the fair; he drew bit in front of the stage just as its noisy occupant, having laid aside his formidable horn, was drawing still more largely on the amazement of "the public" by a feat of especial wonder,—he was eating fire! Curiosity mingled with astonishment was at its height; and feelings not unallied to alarm were beginning to manifest themselves, among the softer sex especially, as they gazed on the flames that issued from the mouth of the living volcano. All eyes, indeed, were fixed upon the fire-eater with an intentness that left no room for observing another worthy who had now emerged upon the scene. This was, however, no less a personage than the *Deus ex machinâ*—the illustrious Aldrovando himself.

Short in stature and spare in form, the sage had somewhat increased the former by a steeple-crowned hat adorned with a cock's feather; while the thick shoulder-padding of a quilted doublet, surmounted by a falling band, added a little to his personal importance in point of breadth. His habit was composed throughout of black serge, relieved with scarlet slashes in the sleeves and trunks; red was the feather in his hat, red were the roses in his shoes, which rejoiced moreover in a pair of red heels. The lining of a short cloak of faded velvet, that hung transversely over his left shoulder, was also red. Indeed, from all that we could ever see or hear, this agreeable alternation of red and black appears to be the mixture of colours most approved at the court of Beelzebub, and the one most generally adopted by his friends and favourites. His features were sharp and shrewd, and a fire sparkled in his keen grey eye, much at variance with the wrinkles that ran their irregular furrows above his prominent and bushy brows. He had advanced slowly from behind his screen while the attention of the multitude was absorbed by the pyrotechnics of Mr. Merryman, and stationing himself at the extreme corner of the stage, stood quietly leaning on a crutch-handle walking staff of blackest ebony, his glance steadily fixed on the face of Marsh, from whose countenance the amusement he had insensibly begun to derive had not succeeded in removing all traces of bodily pain.

For a while the latter was unobservant of the inquisitorial survey with which he was regarded; the eyes of the parties, however, at length met. The brown mare had a fine shoulder; she stood pretty nearly sixteen hands. Marsh himself, though slightly bowed by ill-health and the "coming autumn" of life, was full six feet in height. His elevation giving him an unobstructed view over the heads of the pedestrians, he had naturally fallen into the rear of the assembly, which brought him close to the diminutive Doctor, with whose face, despite the red heels, his own was about upon a level.

"And what makes Master Marsh here? what sees he in the mummeries of a miserable buffoon to divert him when his life is in jeopardy?" said a shrill cracked voice that sounded as in his very ear. It was the Doctor who spoke.

"Knowest thou me, friend?" said Marsh, scanning with awakened interest the figure of his questioner: "I call thee not to mind; and yet—stay, where have we met?"

"It skills not to declare," was the answer; "suffice if we *have* met—in other climes perchance—and now meet happily again—happily at least for thee."

"Why truly the trick of thy countenance reminds me of somewhat I have seen before; where or when I know not: but what wouldst thou with me?"

"Nay, rather what wouldst thou here, Thomas Marsh? What wouldst thou on the Frith of Aldington? Is it a score or two of paltry sheep? or is it something *nearer to thy heart*?"

Marsh started as the last words were pronounced with more than common significance; a pang shot through him at the moment, and the vinegar aspect of the charlatan seemed to relax into a smile half compassionate, half sardonic.

"Grammercy," quoth Marsh, after a long-drawn breath, "what knowest thou of me, fellow, or of my concerns? What knowest thou——"

"This know I, Master Thomas Marsh," said the stranger, gravely, "that thy life is even now perilled, evil practices are against thee; but no matter, thou art quit for the nonce—other hands than mine have saved thee! Thy pains are over. Hark! *the clock strikes One!*" As he spoke, a single toll from the belltower of Bilsington came, wafted by the western breeze, over the thickset and lofty oaks which intervened between the Frith and what had been once a priory. Doctor Aldrovando turned as the sound came floating on the wind, and was moving, as if half in

anger, towards the other side of the stage, where the mountebank, his fires extinct, was now disgorging to the admiring crowd yard after yard of gaudy-coloured riband.

"Stay! Nay, prithee stay!" cried Marsh, eagerly, "I was wrong; in faith I was. A change, and that a sudden and most marvellous, hath indeed come over me; I am free; I breathe again; I feel as though a load of years had been removed; and, is it possible?—hast thou done this?"

"Thomas Marsh!" said the Doctor, pausing, and turning for the moment on his heel, "I have *not*: I repeat, that other and more innocent hands than mine have done this deed. Nevertheless, heed my counsel well! Thou art parlously encompassed; I, and I only, have the means of relieving thee. Follow thy courses; pursue thy journey; but as thou valuest life and more than life, be at the foot of yonder woody knoll what time the rising moon throws her first beam upon the bare and blighted summit that towers above its trees."

He crossed abruptly to the opposite quarter of the scaffolding, and was in an instant deeply engaged in listening to those whom the cow's horn had attracted, and in prescribing for their real or fancied ailments. Vain were all Marsh's efforts again to attract his notice; it was evident that he studiously avoided him; and when, after an hour or more spent in useless endeavour, he saw the object of his anxiety seclude himself once more within his canvas screen, he rode slowly and thoughtfully off the field.

What should he do? Was the man a mere quack? an impostor? His name thus obtained! that might be easily done. But then, his secret griefs: the Doctor's knowledge of them; their cure; for he felt that his pains were gone, his healthful feelings restored!

True; Aldrovando, if that were his name, had disclaimed all co-operation in his recovery; but he knew, or he at least announced it. Nay, more; he had hinted that he was yet in jeopardy; that practices—and the chord sounded strangely in unison with one that had before vibrated within him—that practices were in operation against his life! It was enough! He would keep tryst with the Conjuror, if conjuror he were; and, at least, ascertain who and what he was, and how he had become acquainted with his own person and secret afflictions.

When the late Mr. Pitt was determined to keep out Buonaparte, and prevent his gaining a settlement in the county of Kent, among other ingenious devices adopted for that purpose, he caused to be constructed what was then, and has ever since been

conventionally termed a "Military Canal." This is not a very practicable ditch, some thirty feet wide, and nearly nine feet deep, in the middle, extending from the town and port of Hithe to within a mile of the town and port of Rye, a distance of about twenty miles; and forming, as it were, the cord of a bow, the arc of which constitutes that remote fifth quarter of the globe spoken of by travellers. Trivial objections to the plan were made at the time by cavillers; and an old gentleman of the neighbourhood, who proposed as a cheap substitute, to put down his own cocked-hat upon a pole, was deservedly pooh-pooh'd down; in fact, the job, though rather an expensive one, was found to answer remarkably well. The French managed, indeed, to scramble over the Rhine, and the Rhone, and other insignificant currents; but they never did, or could, pass Mr. Pitt's "Military Canal." At no great distance from the centre of this cord rises abruptly a sort of woody promontory, in shape almost conical; its sides covered with thick underwood, above which is seen a bare and brown summit rising like an Alp in miniature. The "defence of the nation" not being then in existence, Master Marsh met with no obstruction in reaching this place of appointment long before the time prescribed.

So much, indeed, was his mind occupied by his adventure and extraordinary cure, that his original design had been abandoned, and Master Cobbe remained unvisited. A rude hostel in the neighbourhood furnished entertainment for man and horse; and here, a full hour before the rising of the moon, he left Ralph and the other beasts, proceeding to his rendezvous on foot and alone.

"You are punctual, Master Marsh," squeaked the shrill voice of the Doctor, issuing from the thicket as the first silvery gleam trembled on the aspens above.

"'Tis well: now follow me, and in silence."

The first part of the command Marsh hesitated not to obey; the second was more difficult of observance.

"Who and what are you? Whither are you leading me?" burst not unnaturally from his lips; but all question was at once cut short by the peremptory tones of his guide.

"Hush! I say; your finger on your lip, there be hawks abroad; follow me, and that silently and quickly." The little man turned as he spoke, and led the way through a scarcely perceptible path, or track, which wound among the underwood. The lapse of a few minutes brought them to the door of a low building, so hidden by the surrounding trees that a few would have suspected

its existence. It was a cottage of rather extraordinary dimensions, but consisting of only one floor. No smoke rose from its solitary chimney; no cheering ray streamed from its single window, which was, however, secured by a shutter of such thickness as to preclude the possibility of any stray beam issuing from within. The exact size of the building it was, in that uncertain light, difficult to distinguish, a portion of it seeming buried in the wood behind. The door gave way on the application of a key, and Marsh followed his conductor resolutely, but cautiously, along a narrow passage, feebly lighted by a small taper that winked and twinkled at its farther extremity. The Doctor, as he approached, raised it from the ground, and, opening an adjoining door, ushered his guest into the room beyond.

It was a large and oddly furnished apartment, insufficiently lighted by an iron lamp that hung from the roof, and scarcely illumined the walls and angles, which seemed to be composed of some dark-coloured wood. On one side, however, Master Marsh could discover an article bearing strong resemblance to a coffin; on the other was a large oval mirror in an ebony frame, and in the midst of the floor was described, in red chalk, a double circle, about six feet in diameter, its inner verge inscribed with sundry hieroglyphics, agreeably relieved at intervals with an alternation of skulls and cross-bones. In the very centre was deposited one skull of such surpassing size and thickness as would have filled the soul of a Spurzheim or De Ville with wonderment. A large book, a naked sword, an hour-glass, a chafing-dish, and a black cat, completed the list of movables; with the exception of a couple of tapers which stood on each side of the mirror, and which the strange gentleman now proceeded to light from the one in his hand. As they flared up with what Marsh thought a most unnatural brilliancy, he perceived, reflected in the glass behind, a dial suspended over the coffin-like article already mentioned: the hand was fast verging towards the hour of nine. The eyes of the little Doctor seemed riveted on the horologe.

"Now strip thee, Master Marsh and that quickly: untruss, I say! discard thy boots, doff doublet and hose, and place thyself incontinent in yonder bath."

The visitor cast his eyes again upon the formidable-looking article, and perceived that it was nearly filled with water. A cold bath, at such an hour and under such auspices, was anything but inviting: he hesitated, and turned his eyes alternately on the Doctor and the Black Cat.

"Trifle not the time, man, an you be wise," said the former. "Passion of my heart! let but yon minute-hand reach the hour, and thou not immersed, thy life were not worth a pin's fee!"

The Black Cat gave vent to a single mew,—a most unnatural sound for a mouser,—it seemed as it were mewed through a cow's horn.

"Quick, Master Marsh! uncase, or you perish!" repeated his strange host, throwing as he spoke a handful of some dingy-looking powders into the brasier. "Behold the attack is begun!" A thick cloud rose from the embers; a cold shivering shook the astonished Yeoman; sharp pricking pains penetrated his ankles and the palms of his hands, and, as the smoke cleared away, he distinctly saw and recognised in the mirror the boudoir of Marston Hall.

The doors of the well-known ebony cabinet were closed; but fixed against them, and standing out in strong relief from the contrast afforded by the sable background, was a waxen image—of himself! It appeared to be secured, and sustained in an upright posture, by large black pins driven through the feet and palms, the latter of which were extended in a cruciform position. To the right and left stood his wife and José; in the middle, with his back towards him, was a figure which he had no difficulty in recognising as that of the Leech of Folkestone. The latter had just succeeded in fastening the dexter hand of the image, and was now in the act of drawing a broad and keen-edged sabre from its sheath. The Black Cat mewed again. "Haste, or you die!" said the Doctor,—Marsh looked at the dial; it wanted but four minutes of nine: he felt that the crisis of his fate was come. Off went his heavy boots; doublet to the right, galligaskins to the left; never was man more swiftly disrobed. In two minutes, to use an Indian expression, "he was all face!" in another he was on his back, and up to his chin, in a bath which smelt strongly as of brimstone and garlic.

"Heed well the clock!" cried the Conjuror: "with the first stroke of Nine plunge thy head beneath the water, suffer not a hair above the surface: plunge deeply, or thou art lost!"

The little man had seated himself in the centre of the circle upon the large skull, elevating his legs at an angle of forty-five degrees. In this position he spun round with a velocity to be equalled only by that of a tee-totum, the red roses on his insteps seeming to describe a circle of fire. The best buckskins that ever mounted at Melton had soon yielded to such rotatory friction—

but he spun on—the cat mewed, bats and obscene birds fluttered overhead; Erasmus was seen to raise his weapon, the clock struck! and Marsh, who had "ducked" at the instant, popped up his head again, spitting and sputtering, half-choked with the infernal solution, which had insinuated itself into his mouth, and ears, and nose. All disgust at his nauseous dip, was, however, at once removed, when, casting his eyes on the glass, he saw the consternation of the party whose persons it exhibited. Erasmus had evidently made his blow and failed; the figure was unmutilated; the hilt remained in the hand of the striker, while the shivered blade lay in shining fragments on the floor.

The Conjuror ceased his spinning, and brought himself to an anchor; the Black Cat purred,—its purring seemed strangely mixed with the self-satisfied chuckle of a human being. Where had Marsh heard something like it before?

He was rising from his unsavoury couch, when a motion from the little man checked him. "Rest where you are, Thomas Marsh; so far all goes well, but the danger is not yet over!" He looked again, and perceived that the shadowy triumvirate were in deep and eager consultation; the fragments of the shattered weapon appeared to undergo a close scrutiny. The result was clearly unsatisfactory; the lips of the parties moved rapidly, and much gesticulation might be observed, but no sound fell upon the ear. The hand of the dial had nearly reached the quarter: at once the parties separated: and Buckthorne stood again before the figure, his hand armed with a long and sharp-pointed *misericorde,* a dagger little in use of late, but such as, a century before, often performed the part of a modern oyster-knife, in tickling the osteology of a dismounted cavalier through the shelly defences of his plate armour. Again he raised his arm. "Duck!" roared the Doctor, spinning away upon his cephalic pivot:—the Black Cat cocked his tail, and seemed to mew the word "Duck!" Down went Master Marsh's head; one of his hands had unluckily been resting on the edge of the bath: he drew it hastily in, but not altogether scatheless; the stump of a rusty nail, projecting from the margin of the bath, had caught and slightly grazed it. The pain was more acute than is usually produced by such trivial accidents; and Marsh, on once more raising his head, beheld the dagger of the Leech sticking in the little finger of the wax figure, which it had seemingly nailed to the cabinet door.

"By my truly, a scape o' the narrowest!" quoth the Conjuror: "the next course, dive you not the readier, there is no more

life in you than in a pickled herring. What! courage, Master Marsh; but be heedful; an they miss again, let them bide the issue!"

He drew his hand athwart his brow as he spoke, and dashed off the perspiration, which the violence of his exercise had drawn from every pore. Black Tom sprang upon the edge of the bath, and stared full in the face of the bather: his sea-green eyes were lambent with unholy fire, but their marvellous obliquity of vision was not to be mistaken;—the very countenance too! Could it be? —the features were feline, but their expression was that of the Jack Pudding! Was the mountebank a cat? or the cat a mountebank?—it was all a mystery;—and Heaven knows how long Marsh might have continued staring at Grimalkin, had not his attention been again called by Aldrovando to the magic mirror.

Great dissatisfaction, not to say dismay, seemed now to pervade the conspirators; Dame Isabel was closely inspecting the figure's wounded hand, while José was aiding the pharmacopolist to charge a huge petronel with powder and bullets. The load was a heavy one; but Erasmus seemed determined this time to make sure of his object. Somewhat of trepidation might be observed in his manner as he rammed down the balls, and his withered cheek appeared to have acquired an increase of paleness; but amazement rather than fear was the prevailing symptom, and his countenance betrayed no jot of irresolution. As the clock was about to chime half-past nine, he planted himself with a firm foot in front of the image, waved his unoccupied hand with a cautionary gesture to his companions, and, as they hastily retired on either side, brought the muzzle of his weapon within half a foot of his mark. As the shadowy form was about to draw the trigger, Marsh again plunged his head beneath the surface; and the sound of an explosion, as of fire-arms, mingled with the rush of water that poured into his ears. His immersion was but momentary, yet did he feel as though half suffocated: he sprang from the bath, and, as his eye fell on the mirror, he saw,—or thought he saw,—the Leech of Folkestone lying dead on the floor of his wife's boudoir, his head shattered to pieces, and his hand still grasping the stock of a bursten petronel.

He saw no more; his head swam; his senses reeled, the whole room was turning round, and, as he fell to the ground, the last impressions to which he was conscious were the chucklings of a hoarse laughter, and the mewings of a tom cat!

Master Marsh was found the next morning by his bewildered

serving-man, stretched before the door of the humble hostel at which he sojourned. His clothes were somewhat torn and much bemired; and deeply did honest Ralph marvel that one so staid and grave as Master Marsh of Marston should thus have played the roisterer, missing, perchance, a profitable bargain for the drunken orgies of midnight wassail, or the endearments of some rustic light-o'-love. Tenfold was his astonishment increased when, after retracing in silence their journey of the preceding day, the Hall, on their arrival about noon, was found in a state of uttermost confusion. No wife stood there to greet with the smile of bland affection her returning spouse; no page to hold his stirrup, or receive his gloves, his hat, and riding-rod. The doors were open, the rooms in most admired disorder; men and maidens peeping, hurrying hither and thither, and popping in and out, like rabbits in a warren. The lady of the mansion was nowhere to be found.

José, too, had disappeared; the latter had been last seen riding furiously towards Folkestone early in the preceding afternoon: to a question from Hodge Gardener he had hastily answered, that he bore a missive of moment from his mistress. The lean apprentice of Erasmus Buckthorne declared that the page had summoned his master, in haste, about six of the clock, and that they had rode forth together, as he verily believed, on their way back to the Hall, where he had supposed Master Buckthorne's services to be suddenly required on some pressing emergency. Since that time he had seen nought of either of them: the grey cob, however, had returned late at night, masterless, with his girths loose and the saddle turned upside down.

Nor was Master Erasmus Buckthorne ever seen again. Strict search was made through the neighbourhood, but without success; and it was at length presumed that he must, for reasons which nobody could divine, have absconded, together with José and his faithless mistress. The latter had carried off with her the strong box, divers articles of valuable plate, and jewels of price. Her boudoir appeared to have been completely ransacked; the cabinet and drawers stood open and empty; the very carpet, a luxury then newly introduced into England, was gone. Marsh, however, could trace no vestige of the visionary scene which he affirmed to have been last night presented to his eyes.

Much did the neighbours marvel at his story:—some thought him mad; others, that he was merely indulging in that privilege to which, as a traveller, he had a right indefeasible. Trusty Ralph said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders; and, falling into the

rear, imitated the action of raising a wine-cup to his lips. An opinion, indeed, soon prevailed, that Master Thomas Marsh had gotten, in common parlance, exceedingly drunk on the preceding evening and had dreamt all that he so circumstantially related. This belief acquired additional credit when they, whom curiosity induced to visit the woody knoll of Aldington Mount, declared that they could find no building such as that described, nor any cottage near; save one, indeed, a low-roofed hovel, once a house of public entertainment, but now half in ruins. The "Old Cat and Fiddle"—so was the tenement called—had been long uninhabited; yet still exhibited the remains of a broken sign, on which the keen observer might decipher something like a rude portrait of the animal from which it derived its name. It was also supposed still to afford an occasional asylum to the smugglers of the coast, but no trace of any visit from sage or mountebank could be detected; nor was the wise Aldrovando, whom many remembered to have seen at the fair, ever found again on all that country-side.

Of the runaways nothing was ever certainly known. A boat, the property of an old fisherman who plied his trade on the outskirts of the town, had been seen to quit the bay that night; and there were those who declared that she had more hands on board than Carden and his son, her usual complement; but as the gale came on, and the frail bark was eventually found keel upwards on the Goodwin Sands, it was presumed that she had struck on that fatal quicksand in the dark, and that all on board had perished.

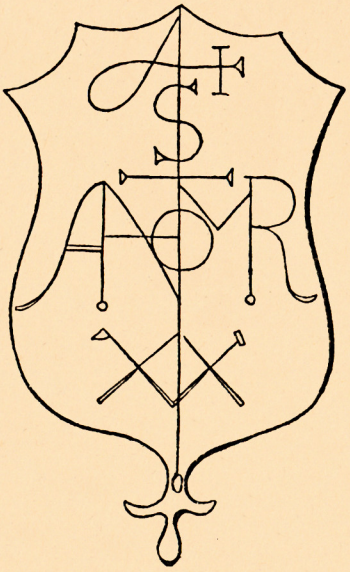
Little Marian, whom her profligate mother had abandoned, grew up to be a fine girl, and a handsome. She became, moreover, heiress to Marston Hall, and brought the estate into the Ingoldsby family by her marriage with one of its scions.

Thus far Mrs. Botherby.

It is a little singular that, on pulling down the old Hall in my grandfather's time, a human skeleton was discovered among the rubbish; under what particular part of the building I could never with any accuracy ascertain; but it was found enveloped in a tattered cloth, that seemed to have been once a carpet, and which fell to pieces almost immediately on being exposed to the air. The bones were perfect, but those of one hand were wanting; and the skull, perhaps from the labourer's pick-axe, had received considerable injury; the worm-eaten stock of an old-fashioned pistol lay near, together with a rusty piece of iron which a workman, more sagacious than his fellows, pronounced a portion of

the lock, but nothing was found which the utmost stretch of human ingenuity could twist into a barrel.

The portrait of the fair Marian hangs yet in the Gallery of Tappington; and near it is another, of a young man in the prime of life, whom Mrs. Botherby affirms to be that of her father. It exhibits a mild and rather melancholy countenance, with a high forehead, and the peaked beard and moustaches of the seventeenth century. The signet-finger of the left hand is gone, and appears, on close inspection, to have been painted out by some later artist; possibly in compliment to the tradition, which, *teste Botherby,* records that of Mr. Marsh to have gangrened, and to have undergone amputation at the knuckle-joint. If really the resemblance of the gentleman alluded to, it must have been taken at some period antecedent to his marriage. There is neither date nor painter's name; but, a little above the head, on the dexter side of the picture, is an escutcheon, bearing "Quarterly Gules and Argent, in the first quarter a horse's head of the second"; beneath it are the words "*Ætatis suæ* 26." On the opposite side is the following mark, which Mr. Simpkinson declares to be that of a Merchant of the Staple, and pretends to discover, in the monogram comprised in it, all the characters which compose the name of THOMAS MARSH, of MARSTON.



Max Beerbohm

A. V. LAIDER

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I unpacked my things and went down to await luncheon.

It was good to be here again in this little old sleepy hostel by the sea. Hostel I say, though it spelt itself without an s and even placed a circumflex above the o. It made no other pretension. It was very cosy indeed.

I had been here just a year before, in mid-February, after an attack of influenza. And now I had returned, after an attack of influenza. Nothing was changed. It had been raining when I left, and the waiter—there was but a single, a very old waiter—had told me it was only a shower. That waiter was still here, not a day older. And the shower had not ceased.

Steadfastly it fell on to the sands, steadfastly into the iron-grey sea. I stood looking out at it from the windows of the hall, admiring it very much. There seemed to be little else to do. What little there was I did. I mastered the contents of a blue hand-bill which, pinned to the wall just beneath the framed engraving of Queen Vitcoria's Coronation, gave token of a concert that was to be held—or rather, was to have been held some weeks ago—in the Town Hall, for the benefit of the Life-Boat Fund. I looked at the barometer, tapped it, was not the wiser. I glanced at a pamphlet about Our Dying Industries (a theme on which Mr. Joseph Chamberlain was at that time trying to alarm us). I wandered to the letter-board.

These letter-boards always fascinate me. Usually some two or three of the envelopes stuck into the cross-garterings have a certain newness and freshness. They seem sure they will yet be claimed. Why not? Why *shouldn't* John Doe, Esq., or Mrs. Richard Roe, turn up at any moment? I do not know. I can only say that nothing in the world seems to me more unlikely. Thus it is that these young bright envelopes touch my heart even more than do their dusty and sallow seniors. Sour resignation is less touching than impatience for what will not be, than the eagerness that has to wane and wither. Soured beyond measure these old envelopes are. They are not nearly so nice as they should be to the young ones. They lose no chance of sneering and discouraging. Such dialogues as this are only too frequent:

A VERY YOUNG ENVELOPE: Something in me whispers that he will come to-day!

A VERY OLD ENVELOPE: He? Well, that's good! Ha, ha, ha! Why didn't he come last week, when *you* came? What reason have you for supposing he'll ever come *now*? It isn't as if he were a frequenter of the place. He's never been here. His name is utterly unknown here. You don't suppose he's coming on the chance of finding *you*?

A. V. Y. E.: It may seem silly, but—something in me whispers—

A. V. O. E.: Something in *you*? One has only to look at you to see there's nothing in you but a note scribbled to him by a cousin. Look at *me*! There are three sheets, closely written, in *me*. The lady to whom I am addressed——

A. V. Y. E.: Yes, sir, yes; you told me all about her yesterday.

A. V. O. E.: And I shall do so to-day and to-morrow and every day and all day long. That young lady was a widow. She stayed here many times. She was delicate, and the air suited her. She was poor, and the tariff was just within her means. She was lonely, and had need of love. I have in me for her a passionate avowal and strictly honourable proposal, written to her, after many rough copies, by a gentleman who had made her acquaintance under this very roof. He was rich, he was charming, he was in the prime of life. He had asked if he might write to her. She had flutteringly granted his request. He posted me to her the day after his return to London. I looked forward to being torn open by her. I was very sure she would wear me and my contents next to her bosom. She was gone. She had left no address. She never returned. . . . This I tell you, and shall continue to tell you, not because I want any of your callow sympathy—no, *thank* you!—but that you may judge how much less than slight are the chances that you yourself——

But my reader has overheard these dialogues as often as I. He wants to know what was odd about this particular letter-board before which I was standing. At first glance I saw nothing odd about it. But presently I distinguished a handwriting that was vaguely familiar. It was mine. I stared, I wondered. There is always a slight shock in seeing an envelope of one's own after it has gone through the post. It looks as if it had gone through so much. But this was the first time I had ever seen an envelope of mine eating its heart out in bondage on a letter-board. This was outrageous. This was hardly to be believed. Sheer kindness

had impelled me to write to "A. V. Laider, Esq.," and this was the result! I hadn't minded receiving no answer. Only now, indeed, did I remember that I hadn't received one. In multitudinous London the memory of A. V. Laider and his trouble had soon passed from my mind. But—well, what a lesson not to go out of one's way to write to casual acquaintances!

My envelope seemed not to recognise me as its writer. Its gaze was the more piteous for being blank. Even so had I once been gazed at by a dog that I had lost and, after many days, found in the Battersea home. "I don't know who you are, but whoever you are, claim me, take me out of this!" That was my dog's appeal. This was the appeal of my envelope.

I raised my hand to the letter-board, meaning to effect a swift and lawless rescue, but paused at sound of a footstep behind me. The old waiter had come to tell me that my luncheon was ready. I followed him out of the hall, not, however, without a bright glance across my shoulder to reassure the little captive that I should come back.

I had the sharp appetite of the convalescent, and this the sea-air had whetted already to a finer edge. In touch with a dozen oysters, and with stout, I soon shed away the unreasoning anger I had felt against A. V. Laider. I became merely sorry for him that he had not received a letter which might perhaps have comforted him. In touch with cutlets, I felt how sorely he had needed comfort. And anon, by the big bright fireside of that small dark smoking-room where, a year ago, on the last evening of my stay here, he and I had at length spoken to each other, I reviewed in detail the tragic experience he had told me; and I fairly revelled in reminiscent sympathy with him. . . .

A. V. Laider—I had looked him up in the visitors' book on the night of his arrival. I myself had arrived the day before, and had been rather sorry there was no one else staying here. A convalescent by the sea likes to have some one to observe, to wonder about, at meal-time. I was glad when, on my second evening, I found seated at the table opposite to mine another guest. I was the gladder because he was just the right kind of guest. He was enigmatic. By this I mean that he did not look soldierly nor financial nor artistic nor anything definite at all. He offered a clean slate for speculation. And thank heaven! he evidently wasn't going to spoil the fun by engaging me in conversation later on. A decently unsociable man, anxious to be left alone.

The heartiness of his appetite, in contrast with his extreme fragility of aspect and limpness of demeanour, assured me that he, too, had just had influenza. I liked him for that. Now and again our eyes met and were instantly parted. We managed, as a rule, to observe each other indirectly. I was sure it was not merely because he had been ill that he looked interesting. Nor did it seem to me that a spiritual melancholy, though I imagined him sad at the best of times, was his sole asset. I conjectured that he was clever. I thought he might also be imaginative. At first glance I had mistrusted him. A shock of white hair, combined with a young face and dark eyebrows, does somehow make a man look like a charlatan. But it is foolish to be guided by an accident of colour. I had soon rejected my first impression of my fellow-diner. I found him very sympathetic.

Anywhere but in England it would be impossible for two solitary men, howsoever much reduced by influenza, to spend five or six days in the same hostel and not exchange a single word. That is one of the charms of England. Had Laider and I been born and bred in any other land we should have become acquainted before the end of our first evening in the small smoking-room, and have found ourselves irrevocably committed to go on talking to each other throughout the rest of our visit. We might, it is true, have happened to like each other more than any one we had ever met. This off-chance may have occurred to us both. But it counted for nothing as against the certain surrender of quietude and liberty. We slightly bowed to each other as we entered or left the dining-room or smoking-room, and as we met on the widespread sands or in the shop that had a small and faded circulating library. That was all. Our mutual aloofness was a positive bond between us.

Had he been much older than I, the responsibility for our silence would of course have been his alone. But he was not, I judged, more than five or six years ahead of me, and thus I might without impropriety have taken it on myself to perform that hard and perilous feat which English people call, with a shiver, "breaking the ice." He had reason, therefore, to be as grateful to me as I to him. Each of us, not the less frankly because silently, recognised his obligation to the other. And when, on the last evening of my stay, the ice actually was broken no ill-will rose between us: neither of us was to blame.

It was a Sunday evening. I had been out for a long last walk and had come in very late to dinner. Laider left his table almost

immediately after I sat down to mine. When I entered the smoking-room I found him reading a weekly review which I had bought the day before. It was a crisis. He could not silently offer, nor could I have silently accepted, sixpence. It was a crisis. We faced it like men. He made, by word of mouth, a graceful apology. Verbally, not by signs, I besought him to go on reading. But this, of course, was a vain counsel of perfection. The social code forced us to talk now. We obeyed it like men. To reassure him that our position was not so desperate as it might seem, I took the earliest opportunity to mention that I was going away early next morning. In the tone of his "Oh, are you?" he tried bravely to imply that he was sorry, even now, to hear that. In a way, perhaps, he really was sorry. We had got on so well together, he and I. Nothing could efface the memory of that. Nay, we seemed to be hitting it off even now. Influenza was not our sole theme. We passed from that to the aforesaid weekly review, and to a correspondence that was raging therein on Faith and Reason.

This correspondence had now reached its fourth and penultimate stage—its Australian stage. It is hard to see why these correspondences spring up; one only knows that they do spring up, suddenly, like street crowds. There comes, it would seem, a moment when the whole English-speaking race is unconsciously bursting to have its say about some one thing—the split infinitive, or the habits of migratory birds, or faith and reason, or what-not. Whatever weekly review happens at such a moment to contain a reference, however remote, to the theme in question reaps the storm. Gusts of letters blow in from all corners of the British Isles. These are presently reinforced by Canada in full blast. A few weeks later the Anglo-Indians weigh in. In due course we have the help of our Australian cousins. By that time, however, we of the Mother Country have got our second wind, and so determined are we to make the most of it that at last even the Editor suddenly loses patience and says "This correspondence must now cease. —Ed." and wonders why on earth he ever allowed anything so tedious and idiotic to begin.

I pointed out to Laider one of the Australian letters that had especially pleased me in the current issue. It was from "A Melbourne Man," and was of the abrupt kind which declares that "all your correspondents have been groping in the dark" and then settles the whole matter in one short sharp flash. The flash in this instance was "Reason is faith—faith reason—that is all we know on earth and all we need to know." The writer then in-

closed his card and was, etc., "A Melbourne Man." I said to Laider how very restful it was, after influenza, to read anything that meant nothing whatsoever. Laider was inclined to take the letter more seriously than I, and to be mildly metaphysical. I said that for me faith and reason were two separate things, and (as I am no good at metaphysics, however mild) I offered a definite example, to coax the talk on to ground where I should be safer. "Palmistry, for example," I said. "Deep down in my heart I believe in palmistry."

Laider turned in his chair. "You believe in palmistry?"

I hesitated. "Yes, somehow I do. Why? I haven't the slightest notion. I can give myself all sorts of reasons for laughing it to scorn. My common sense utterly rejects it. Of course the shape of the hand means something—is more or less an index of character. But the idea that my past and future are neatly mapped out on my palms——" I shrugged my shoulders.

"You don't like that idea?" asked Laider in his gentle, rather academic voice.

"I only say it's a grotesque idea."

"Yet you do believe in it?"

"I've a grotesque belief in it, yes."

"Are you sure your reason for calling this idea 'grotesque' isn't merely that you dislike it?"

"Well," I said, with the thrilling hope that he was a companion in absurdity, "doesn't it seem grotesque to *you*?"

"It seems strange."

"You believe in it?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"Hurrah!"

He smiled at my pleasure, and I, at the risk of re-entanglement in metaphysics, claimed him as standing shoulder to shoulder with me against "A Melbourne Man." This claim he gently disputed. "You may think me very prosaic," he said, "but I can't believe without evidence."

"Well, I'm equally prosaic and equally at a disadvantage: I can't take my own belief as evidence, and I've no other evidence to go on."

He asked me if I had ever made a study of palmistry. I said I had read one of Desbarolles' books years ago, and one of Heron-Allen's. But, he asked, had I tried to test them by the lines on my own hands or on the hands of my friends? I confessed that my actual practice in palmistry had been of a merely passive

kind—the prompt extension of my palm to any one who would be so good as to "read" it and truckle for a few minutes to my egoism. (I hoped Laider might do this.)

"Then I almost wonder," he said, with his sad smile, "that you haven't lost your belief, after all the nonsense you must have heard. There are so many young girls who go in for palmistry. I am sure all the five foolish virgins were 'awfully keen on it' and used to say 'You can be led, but not driven,' and 'You are likely to have a serious illness between the ages of forty and forty-five,' and 'You are by nature rather lazy, but can be very energetic by fits and starts.' And most of the professionals, I'm told, are as silly as the young girls."

For the honour of the profession, I named three practitioners whom I had found really good at reading character. He asked whether any of them had been right about past events. I confessed that, as a matter of fact, all three of them had been right in the main. This seemed to amuse him. He asked whether any of them had predicted anything which had since come true. I confessed that all three had predicted that I should do several things which I had since done rather unexpectedly. He asked if I didn't accept this as at any rate a scrap of evidence. I said I could only regard it as a fluke—a rather remarkable fluke.

The superiority of his sad smile was beginning to get on my nerves. I wanted him to see that he was as absurd as I. "Suppose," I said, "suppose for sake of argument that you and I are nothing but helpless automata created to do just this and that, and to have just that and this done to us. Suppose, in fact, we *haven't* any free will whatsoever. Is it likely or conceivable that the Power that fashioned us would take the trouble to jot down in cipher on our hands just what was in store for us?"

Laider did not answer this question, he did but annoyingly ask me another. "You believe in free will?"

"Yes, of course. I'll be hanged if I'm an automaton."

"And you believe in free will just as in palmistry—without any reason?"

"Oh, no. Everything points to our having free will."

"Everything? What, for instance?"

This rather cornered me. I dodged out, as lightly as I could, by saying "I suppose *you* would say it was written in my hand that I should be a believer in free will."

"Ah, I've no doubt it is."

I held out my palms. But, to my great disappointment, he

looked quickly away from them. He had ceased to smile. There was agitation in his voice as he explained that he never looked at people's hands now. "Never now—never again." He shook his head as though to beat off some memory.

I was much embarrassed by my indiscretion. I hastened to tide over the awkward moment by saying that if *I* could read hands I wouldn't for fear of the awful things I might see there.

"Awful things, yes," he whispered, nodding at the fire.

"Not," I said in self-defence, "that there's anything very awful, so far as I know, to be read in *my* hands."

He turned his gaze from the fire to me. "You aren't a murderer, for example?"

"Oh, no," I replied, with a nervous laugh.

"*I* am."

This was a more than awkward, it was a painful, moment for me; and I am afraid I must have started or winced, for he instantly begged my pardon. "I don't know," he exclaimed, "why I said it. I'm usually a very reticent man. But sometimes——" He pressed his brow. "What you must think of me!"

I begged him to dismiss the matter from his mind.

"It's very good of you to say that; but—I've placed myself as well as you in a false position. I ask you to believe that I'm not the sort of man who is 'wanted' or ever was 'wanted' by the police. I should be bowed out of any police-station at which I gave myself up. I'm not a murderer in any bald sense of the word. No."

My face must have perceptibly brightened, for "Ah," he said, "don't imagine I'm not a murderer at all. Morally, I am." He looked at the clock. I pointed out that the night was young. He assured me that his story was not a long one. I assured him that I hoped it was. He said I was very kind. I denied this. He warned me that what he had to tell might rather tend to stiffen my unwilling faith in palmistry, and to shake my opposite and cherished faith in free will. I said "Never mind." He stretched his hands pensively toward the fire. I settled myself back in my chair.

"My hands," he said, staring at the backs of them," are the hands of a very weak man. I dare say you know enough of palmistry to see that for yourself. You notice the slightness of the thumbs and of the two 'little' fingers. They are the hands of a weak and over-sensitive man—a man without confidence, a man who would certainly waver in an emergency. Rather Hamlet-ish hands," he mused. "And I'm like Hamlet in other respects, too:

I'm no fool, and I've rather a noble disposition, and I'm unlucky. But Hamlet was luckier than I in one thing: he was a murderer by accident, whereas the murders that I committed one day fourteen years ago—for I must tell you it wasn't one murder, but many murders that I committed—were all of them due to the wretched inherent weakness of my own wretched self.

"I was twenty-six—no, twenty-seven years old, and rather a nondescript person, as I am now. I was supposed to have been called to the Bar. In fact, I believe I *had* been called to the Bar. I hadn't listened to the call. I never intended to practise, and I never did practise. I only wanted an excuse in the eyes of the world for existing. I suppose the nearest I have ever come to practising is now at this moment: I am defending a murderer. My father had left me well enough provided with money. I was able to go my own desultory way, riding my hobbies where I would. I had a good stableful of hobbies. Palmistry was one of them. I was rather ashamed of this one. It seemed to me absurd, as it seems to you. Like you, though, I believed in it. Unlike you, I had done more than merely read a book or so about it. I had read innumerable books about it. I had taken casts of all my friends' hands. I had tested and tested again the points at which Desbarolles dissented from the gypsies, and—well, enough that I had gone into it all rather thoroughly, and was as sound a palmist as a man may be without giving his whole life to palmistry.

"One of the first things I had seen in my own hand, as soon as I had learned to read it, was that at about the age of twenty-six I should have a narrow escape from death—from a violent death. There was a clean break in the life-line, and a square joining it—the protective square, you know. The markings were precisely the same in both hands. It was to be the narrowest escape possible. And I wasn't going to escape without injury, either. That is what bothered me. There was a faint line connecting the break in the life-line with a star on the line of health. Against that star was another square. I was to recover from the injury, whatever it might be. Still, I didn't exactly look forward to it. Soon after I had reached the age of twenty-five, I began to feel uncomfortable. The thing might be going to happen at any moment. In palmistry, you know, it is impossible to pin an event down hard and fast to one year. This particular event was to be when I was *about* twenty-six; it mightn't be till I was twenty-seven; it might be while I was only twenty-five.

"And I used to tell myself that it mightn't be at all. My reason rebelled against the whole notion of palmistry, just as yours does. I despised my faith in the thing, just as you despise yours. I used to try not to be so ridiculously careful as I was whenever I crossed a street. I lived in London at that time. Motor-cars had not yet come in, but—what hours, all told, I must have spent standing on curbs, very circumspect, very lamentable! It was a pity, I suppose, that I had no definite occupation—something to take me out of myself. I was one of the victims of private means. There came a time when I drove in four-wheelers rather than in hansoms, and was doubtful of four-wheelers. Oh, I assure you, I was very lamentable indeed.

"If a railway-journey could be avoided, I avoided it. My uncle had a place in Hampshire. I was very fond of him and of his wife. Theirs was the only house I ever went to stay in now. I was there for a week in November, not long after my twenty-seventh birthday. There were other people staying there, and at the end of the week we all travelled back to London together. There were six of us in the carriage: Colonel Elbourn and his wife and their daughter, a girl of seventeen; and another married couple, the Blakes. I had been at Winchester with Blake, but had hardly seen him since that time. He was in the Indian Civil, and was home on leave. He was sailing for India next week. His wife was to remain in England for some months, and then join him out there. They had been married five years. She was now just twenty-four years old. He told me that this was her age.

"The Elbourns I had never met before. They were charming people. We had all been very happy together. The only trouble had been that on the last night, at dinner, my uncle asked me if I still went in for 'the gypsy business,' as he always called it; and of course the three ladies were immensely excited, and implored me to 'do' their hands. I told them it was all nonsense, I said I had forgotten all I once knew, I made various excuses; and the matter dropped. It was quite true that I had given up reading hands. I avoided anything that might remind me of what was in my own hands. And so, next morning, it was a great bore to me when, soon after the train started, Mrs. Elbourn said it would be 'too cruel' of me if I refused to do their hands now. Her daughter and Mrs. Blake also said it would be 'brutal'; and they were all taking off their gloves, and—well, of course I had to give in.

"I went to work methodically on Mrs. Elbourn's hands, in the

usual way, you know, first sketching the character from the backs of them; and there was the usual hush, broken by the usual little noises—grunts of assent from the husband, cooings of recognition from the daughter. Presently I asked to see the palms, and from them I filled in the details of Mrs. Elbourn's character before going on to the events of her life. But while I talked I was calculating how old Mrs. Elbourn might be. In my first glance at her palms I had seen that she could not have been less than twenty-five when she married. The daughter was seventeen. Suppose the daughter had been born a year later—how old would the mother be? Forty-three, yes. Not less than that, poor woman!"

Laider looked at me. "Why 'poor woman,' you wonder? Well, in that first glance I had seen other things than her marriage-line. I had seen a very complete break in the lines of life and of fate. I had seen violent death there. At what age? Not later, not possibly *later,* than forty-three. While I talked to her about the things that had happened in her girlhood, the back of my brain was hard at work on those marks of catastrophe. I was horribly wondering that she was still alive. It was impossible that between her and that catastrophe there could be more than a few short months. And all the time I was talking; and I suppose I acquitted myself well, for I remember that when I ceased I had a sort of ovation from the Elbourns.

"It was a relief to turn to another pair of hands. Mrs. Blake was an amusing young creature, and her hands were very characteristic, and prettily odd in form. I allowed myself to be rather whimsical about her nature, and having begun in that vein, I went on in it—somehow—even after she had turned her palms. In those palms were reduplicated the signs I had seen in Mrs. Elbourn's. It was as though they had been copied neatly out. The only difference was in the placing of them; and it was this difference that was the most horrible point. The fatal age in Mrs. Blake's hands was—not past, no, for here *she* was. But she might have died when she was twenty-one. Twenty-three seemed to be the utmost span. She was twenty-four, you know.

"I have said that I am a weak man. And you will have a good proof of that directly. Yet I showed a certain amount of strength that day—yes, even on that day which has humiliated and saddened the rest of my life. Neither my face nor my voice betrayed me when in the palms of Dorothy Elbourn I was again confronted with those same signs. She was all for knowing the future, poor child! I believe I told her all manner of things that

were to be. And she had no future—none, none in *this* world—except——

"And then, while I talked, there came to me suddenly a suspicion. I wondered it hadn't come before. You guess what it was? It made me feel very cold and strange. I went on talking. But, also, I went on—quite separately—thinking. The suspicion wasn't a certainty. This mother and daughter were always together. What was to befall the one might anywhere—anywhere—befall the other. But a like fate, in an equally near future, was in store for that other lady. The coincidence was curious, very. Here we all were together—here, they and I—I who was narrowly to escape, so soon now, what they, so soon now, were to suffer. Oh, there was an inference to be drawn. Not a *sure* inference, I told myself. And always I was talking, talking, and the train was swinging and swaying noisily along—to what? It was a fast train. Our carriage was near the engine. I was talking loudly. Full well I had known what I should see in the Colonel's hands. I told myself I had not known. I told myself that even now the thing I dreaded was not sure to be. Don't think I was dreading it for myself. I wasn't so 'lamentable' as all that—now. It was only of them that I thought—only for them. I hurried over the Colonel's character and career; I was perfunctory. It was Blake's hands that I wanted. *They* were the hands that mattered. If *they* had the marks—— Remember, Blake was to start for India in the coming week, his wife was to remain in England. They would be apart. Therefore——

"And the marks were there. And I did nothing—nothing but hold forth on the subtleties of Blake's character. There was a thing for me to do. I wanted to do it. I wanted to spring to the window and pull the communication-cord. Quite a simple thing to do. Nothing easier than to stop a train. You just give a sharp pull, and the train slows down, comes to a standstill. And the Guard appears at your window. You explain to the Guard.

"Nothing easier than to tell him there is going to be a collision. Nothing easier than to insist that you and your friends and every other passenger in the train must get out at once. . . . There *are* easier things than this? Things that need less courage than this? Some of *them* I could have done, I daresay. This thing I was going to do. Oh, I was determined that I would do it—directly.

"I had said all I had to say about Blake's hands. I had brought my entertainment to an end. I had been thanked and compli-

mented all round. I was quite at liberty. I was going to do what I had to do. I was determined, yes.

"We were nearing the outskirts of London. The air was grey, thickening; and Dorothy Elbourn had said, 'Oh, this horrible old London! I suppose there's the same old fog!' And presently I heard her father saying something about 'prevention' and 'a short act of Parliament' and 'anthracite.' And I sat and listened and agreed and——"

Laider closed his eyes. He passed his hand slowly through the air.

"I had a racking headache. And when I said so, I was told not to talk. I was in bed, and the nurses were always telling me not to talk. I was in a hospital. I knew that. But I didn't know why I was there. One day I thought I should like to know why, and so I asked. I was feeling much better now. They told me, by degrees, that I had had concussion of the brain. I had been brought there unconscious, and had remained unconscious for forty-eight hours. I had been in an accident—a railway accident. This seemed to me odd. I had arrived quite safely at my uncle's place, and I had no memory of any journey since that. In cases of concussion, you know, it's not uncommon for the patient to forget all that happened just before the accident; there may be a blank of several hours. So it was in my case. One day my uncle was allowed to come and see me. And somehow, suddenly at sight of him, the blank was filled in. I remembered, in a flash, everything. I was quite calm, though. Or I made myself seem so, for I wanted to know how the collision had happened. My uncle told me that the engine-driver had failed to see a signal because of the fog, and our train had crashed into a goods-train. I didn't ask him about the people who were with me. You see, there was no need to ask. Very gently my uncle began to tell me, but—I had begun to talk strangely, I suppose. I remember the frightened look of my uncle's face, and the nurse scolding him in whispers.

"After that, all a blur. It seems that I became very ill indeed, wasn't expected to live. However, I live."

There was a long silence. Laider did not look at me, nor I at him. The fire was burning low, and he watched it.

At length he spoke. "You despise me. Naturally. I despise myself."

"No, I don't despise you; but——"

"You blame me." I did not meet his gaze. "You blame me," he repeated.

"Yes."

"And there, if I may say so, you are a little unjust. It isn't my fault that I was born weak."

"But a man may conquer weakness."

"Yes, if he is endowed with the strength for that."

His fatalism drew from me a gesture of disgust. "Do you really mean," I asked, "that because you didn't pull that cord, you *couldn't* have pulled it?"

"Yes."

"And it's written in your hands that you couldn't?"

He looked at the palms of his hands. "They are the hands of a very weak man," he said.

"A man so weak that he cannot believe in the possibility of free will for himself or for any one?"

"They are the hands of an intelligent man, who can weigh evidence and see things as they are."

"But answer me: Was it fore-ordained that you should not pull that cord?"

"It was fore-ordained."

"And was it actually marked in your hands that you were not going to pull it?"

"Ah, well you see, it is rather the things one *is* going to do that are actually marked. The things one *isn't* going to do—the innumerable negative things—how could one expect *them* to be marked?"

"But the consequences of what one leaves undone may be positive?"

"Horribly positive," he winced. "My hand is the hand of a man who has suffered a great deal in later life."

"And was it the hand of a man *destined* to suffer?"

"Oh, yes. I thought I told you that."

There was a pause.

"Well," I said, with awkward sympathy. "I suppose all hands are the hands of people destined to suffer."

"Not of people destined to suffer so much as *I* have suffered—as I still suffer."

The insistence of his self-pity chilled me, and I harked back to a question he had not straightly answered. "Tell me: Was it marked in your hands that you were not going to pull that cord?"

Again he looked at his hands, and then, having pressed them

for a moment to his face, "It was marked very clearly," he answered, "in *their* hands."

Two or three days after this colloquy there had occurred to me in London an idea—an ingenious and comfortable doubt. How was Laider to be sure that his brain, recovering from concussion, had *remembered* what happened in the course of that railway-journey? How was he to know that his brain hadn't simply, in its abeyance, *invented* all this for him? It might be that he had never seen those signs in those hands. Assuredly, here was a bright loop-hole. I had forthwith written to Laider, pointing it out.

This was the letter which now, at my second visit, I had found miserably pent on the letter-board. I remembered my promise to rescue it. I arose from the retaining fireside, stretched my arms, yawned, and went forth to fulfil my Christian purpose. There was no one in the hall. The "shower" had at length ceased. The sun had positively come out, and the front door had been thrown open in its honour. Everything along the sea-front was beautifully gleaming, drying, shimmering. But I was not to be diverted from my errand. I went to the letter-board. And—my letter was not there! Resourceful and plucky little thing—it had escaped! I did hope it would not be captured and brought back. Perhaps the alarm had already been raised by the tolling of that great bell which warns the inhabitants for miles around that a letter has broken loose from the letter-board. I had a vision of my envelope skimming wildly along the coast-line, pursued by the old but active waiter and a breathless pack of local worthies. I saw it outdistancing them all, dodging past coast-guards, doubling on its tracks, leaping breakwaters, unluckily injuring itself, losing speed, and at last, in a splendour of desperation, taking to the open sea. But suddenly I had another idea. Perhaps Laider had returned?

He had. I espied afar on the sands a form that was recognisably, by the listless droop of it, his. I was glad and sorry—rather glad, because he completed the scene of last year; and very sorry, because this time we should be at each other's mercy: no restful silence and liberty, for either of us, this time. Perhaps he had been told I was here, and had gone out to avoid me while he yet could. Oh weak, weak! Why palter? I put on my hat and coat, and marched out to meet him.

"Influenza, of course?" we asked simultaneously.

There is a limit to the time which one man may spend in talk-

ing to another about his own influenza; and presently, as we paced the sands, I felt that Laider had passed this limit. I wondered that he didn't break off and thank me now for my letter. He must have read it. He ought to have thanked me for it at once. It was a very good letter, a remarkable letter. But surely he wasn't waiting to answer it by post? His silence about it gave me the absurd sense of having taken a liberty, confound him! He was evidently ill at ease while he talked. But it wasn't for me to help him out of his difficulty, whatever that might be. It was for him to remove the strain imposed on myself.

Abruptly, after a long pause, he did now manage to say, "It was—very good of you to—to write me that letter." He told me he had only just got it, and he drifted away into otiose explanations of this fact. I thought he might at least say it was a remarkable letter; and you can imagine my annoyance when he said, after another interval, "I was very much touched indeed." I had wished to be convincing, not touching. I can't bear to be called touching.

"Don't you," I asked, "think it *is* quite possible that your brain invented all those memories of what—what happened before that accident?"

He drew a sharp sigh. "You make me feel very guilty."

"That's exactly what I tried to make you *not* feel!"

"I know, yes. That's why I feel so guilty."

We had paused in our walk. He stood nervously prodding the hard wet sand with his walking-stick. "In a way," he said, "your theory was quite right. But—it didn't go far enough. It's not only possible, it's a fact, that I didn't see those signs in those hands. I never examined those hands. They weren't there. *I* wasn't there. I haven't an uncle in Hampshire, even. I never had."

I too, prodded the sand. "Well," I said at length, "I do feel rather a fool."

"I've no right even to beg your pardon, but——"

"Oh, I'm not vexed. Only—I rather wish you hadn't told me this."

"I wish I hadn't had to. It was your kindness, you see, that forced me. By trying to take an imaginary load off my conscience, you laid a very real one on it."

"I'm sorry. But you, of your own free will, you know, exposed your conscience to me last year. I don't yet quite understand why you did that."

"No, of course not. I don't deserve that you should. But I

think you will. May I explain? I'm afraid I've talked a great deal already about my influenza, and I shan't be able to keep it out of my explanation. Well, my weakest point—I told you this last year, but it happens to be perfectly true that my weakest point—is my will. Influenza, as you know, fastens unerringly on one's weakest point. It doesn't attempt to undermine my imagination. That would be a forlorn hope. I have, alas! a very strong imagination. At ordinary times my imagination allows itself to be governed by my will. My will keeps it in check by constant nagging. But when my will isn't strong enough even to nag, then my imagination stampedes. I become even as a little child. I tell myself the most preposterous fables, and—the trouble is—I can't help telling them to my friends. Until I've thoroughly shaken off influenza, I'm not fit company for any one. I perfectly realise this, and I have the good sense to go right away till I'm quite well again. I come here usually. It seems absurd, but I must confess I was sorry last year when we fell into conversation. I knew I should very soon be letting myself go, or rather, very soon be swept away. Perhaps I ought to have warned you; but—I'm a rather shy man. And then you mentioned the subject of palmistry. You said you believed in it. I wondered at that. I had once read Desbarolles' book about it, but I am bound to say I thought the whole thing very great nonsense indeed."

"Then," I gasped, "it isn't even true that you believe in palmistry?"

"Oh, no. But I wasn't able to tell you that. You had begun by saying that you believed in palmistry, and then you proceeded to scoff at it. While you scoffed I saw myself as a man with a terribly good reason for *not* scoffing; and in a flash I saw the terribly good reason; I had the whole story—at least I had the broad outlines of it—clear before me."

"You hadn't ever thought of it before?" He shook his head. My eyes beamed. "The whole thing was a sheer improvisation?"

"Yes," said Laider, humbly, "I am as bad as all that. I don't say that all the details of the story I told you that evening were filled in at the very instant of its conception. I was filling them in while we talked about palmistry in general, and while I was waiting for the moment when the story would come in most effectively. And I've no doubt I added some extra touches in the course of the actual telling. Don't imagine that I took the slightest pleasure in deceiving you. It's only my will, not my conscience, that is weakened after influenza. I simply can't help telling what

I've made up, and telling it to the best of my ability. But I'm thoroughly ashamed all the time."

"Not of your ability, surely?"

"Yes, of that, too," he said with his sad smile. "I always feel that I'm not doing justice to my idea."

"You are too stern a critic, believe me."

"It is very kind of you to say that. You are very kind altogether. Had I known that you were so essentially a man of the world—in the best sense of that term—I shouldn't have so much dreaded seeing you just now and having to confess to you. But I'm not going to take advantage of your urbanity and your easy-going ways. I hope that some day we may meet somewhere when I haven't had influenza and am a not wholly undesirable acquaintance. As it is, I refuse to let you associate with me. I am an older man than you, and so I may without impertinence warn you against having anything to do with me."

I deprecated this advice, of course; but, for a man of weakened will, he showed great firmness. "You," he said, "in your heart of hearts don't want to have to walk and talk continually with a person who might at any moment try to bamboozle you with some ridiculous tale. And I, for my part, don't want to degrade myself by trying to bamboozle any one—especially one whom I have taught to see through me. Let the two talks we have had be as though they had not been. Let us bow to each other, as last year, but let that be all. Let us follow in all things the precedent of last year."

With a smile that was almost gay he turned on his heel, and moved away with a step that was almost brisk. I was a little disconcerted. But I was also more than a little glad. The restfulness of silence, the charm of liberty—these things were not, after all, forfeit. My heart thanked Laider for that; and throughout the week I loyally seconded him in the system he had laid down for us. All was as it had been last year. We did not smile to each other, we merely bowed, when we entered or left the dining-room or smoking-room, and when we met on the widespread sands or in that shop which had a small and faded, but circulating, library.

Once or twice in the course of the week it did occur to me that perhaps Laider had told the simple truth at our first interview and an ingenious lie at our second. I frowned at this possibility. The idea of any one wishing to be quit of *me* was most distasteful. However, I was to find reassurance. On the last evening of my stay, I suggested, in the small smoking-room, that he and I

should, as sticklers for precedent, converse. We did so, very pleasantly. And after a while I happened to say that I had seen this afternoon a great number of sea-gulls flying close to the shore.

"Sea-gulls?" said Laider, turning in his chair.

"Yes. And I don't think I had ever realised how extraordinarily beautiful they are when their wings catch the light."

"Beautiful?" Laider threw a quick glance at me and away from me. "You think them beautiful?"

"Surely."

"Well, perhaps they are, yes; I suppose they are. But—I don't like seeing them. They always remind me of something—rather an awful thing—that once happened to me." . . .

It was a very awful thing indeed.

J. D. Beresford

CUT-THROAT FARM

Reprinted from *Nineteen Impressions* by special permission of the author.

"Ah! Us calls un coot-thro-at farm," said my driver.

"But why?" I asked nervously.

"Yew'll see whoy when yew gets there." And this was all the information I could get from him. So, finding excuse for the driver's ill-temper in the sodden weather, I shielded my strained eyes from the onslaught of the rain and relapsed into silence.

For two miles or thereabouts after leaving Mawdsley we had followed a decent road, but now we were jerking warily down a rutted lane that appeared, so far as I could see through the blur of rain, to creep downwards into a dark, tree-clad valley, the depths of which were obscured in a mass of soaked, depressing verdure. Still the track fell and fell, and on my left I could see a dark slope of trees rising higher and higher above me—a slope that, seen thus dimly, appeared gigantic, overpowering. Then the lane plunged, dipping ever more steeply, into a black wood, and I clung to the side of the swaying cart, expecting catastrophe every moment. I tried desperately to combat the gloom that was

overpowering me; I repeated to myself that this was England, that I was within a hundred miles of London, that I was going to spend a delightful summer at the "Valley Farm"; but, despite my efforts, a horror of the place gripped me; I found myself absurdly muttering "The Valley of the Shadow of Death."

The wood ended abruptly, and we came out on the very keel of the valley. "That's un," muttered my driver with a nod; and, shaking the rain from my cap, I discerned a hunched, lop-sided house that crouched in a clearing at the foot of the opposite slope. I pictured it as having slid down the interminable wave of trees that reared its dim crest into the sky beyond, as having slid till brought to a too sudden standstill in the place where it now remained, dislocated, a confusion.

Such was my coming, my first sight of "Cut-throat Farm." If my subsequent experience seems morbid and unaccountable, my final cowardice indefensible, excuse must be found in that first impression which tinged my mind with a gloom and foreboding I could not afterwards throw off.

It was at starveling place. The stock was meagre: a single cow, whose bones were too prominent even for an Alderney, a scatter of ragged, long-legged fowls, three draggled ducks, an old loose-skinned black sow. This was all, save for "my little pig," as I learned fondly to call him, the one bright, cheerful thing in all the valley; a whimsical creature of quaint moods, full of an odd humour that had in it some quality of sadness. Looking back, I see now that his fun was an attempt, largely successful, to make what he could of his short life, to jest in the face of death. . . . My host and his wife were an awe-inspiring couple. He was short and swarthy, the hairiest man I have ever seen, bearded to the cheek bones, with hair low down over his strip of forehead, and great woolly eyebrows. His wife was tall, predatory, with a high-bridged, bony nose and wistfully hungry eyes; she was thinner, more angular even than the emaciated cow: that hastily covered skeleton who stood mournfully ruminant in the dirty yard.

My first morning at the Valley Farm was marked by an incident, not in itself unduly disconcerting, but typical, an incident surcharged, as I see now, with warning. I had had breakfast. I remember that at the time I considered it scanty (later, it became a memory of plenty) and insufficient even for the standard of thirty shillings a week, a sum that covered the whole cost of my entertainment. I considered this price very reasonable when I answered the advertisement.

After breakfast I stood by the window, which was open at the bottom, the top sash being fixed. Outside were clustered the half-dozen gawky chickens, clamorous and excited, straining their stringy necks to look into the room over the low sill. "The poor brutes are hungry," I muttered with some feeling, and I fetched a fragment of crust and threw it to them. Lord! how they fought for those few crumbs! I turned back into the room to get the remainder of the bread left from my breakfast, and, as I turned, a lanky young cockerel, inflamed by a desperate courage, hopped over the sill and followed me. I heard him come, and, interested to note to what lengths he would go, I retreated further into the room. In an instant he was on the table and had seized the chunk of bread from the platter; then, with a frightened squawk, he was out and off across the yard, sprinting away with impetuous, leaping strides, outstretching his fellows, who had immediately set off after him in hot pursuit. On his way he had to pass my little pig (my first sight of him, and how typical), who was sauntering casually in the direction of the yard gate. An inveterate jester, my little pig; he slewed round suddenly as the straining bird came up to him and made a well-timed snap which startled the rooster, intent only upon the hungry crowd behind, into dropping his booty, a morsel something too large for his gaping beak. I can still see the merry twinkle in my little pig's eyes as he ate that piece of bread. It seemed to me that he was unduly deliberate in the doing of it; maybe he chaffed the resentful but intimidated young cockerel, in some Esperanto of the farmyard, as he ate. . . . Nothing else of any account happened that morning; I remember I saw the farmer sharpening his knife, and wondered what he could find to kill with it. . . .

The next morning the young cockerel was not among the expectant group of five that waited under my window; but I met him again at dinner, and as I essayed to gather nourishment from his ill-covered bones, I smiled again over my recollection of his encounter with my little black pig. He is such a neat, quaint little creature, that pig; we have become friends over a few scraps of food, though he allows no liberties as yet. . . .

Among my notes of that stay at the Valley Farm I have found the following; they seem to me so full of suggestion that I append them just as they stand:

"The stock is disappearing; only one old fowl left—the one that has twice provided me with an egg, or so I judge from her ululations. I suppose she will be kept to the last. . . . I was right;

there are only two ducks this morning. . . . The ducks are all finished at last (thank Heaven!), but I have a horrible fear upon me. The cow has disappeared! The farmer's wife says they have sold her. Did she buy the suspiciously lean and stringy beef I now live on with the price of her? . . . The sow has gone, and the farmer's wife has bought pork with the money obtained. I may be wrong in thus associating the meat I am given with those vanished animals. Can it be possible that there is some superstition or sentimental affection in buying the flesh of animals similar to those they have just sold? I see points about this theory, but why is the farmer always sharpening his knife? . . . I cannot believe it! He is not there this morning, and yet, surely, no Spanish Conquistadore of the sixteenth century could have had the brutality to kill my little pig, my whimsical, wayward, humorous little companion, the one living thing in all this accursed valley that could smile in the face of doom. . . . More pork! It *must* be the remains of the old sow; but why has she become so suddenly tender? How is it that she has furnished me with the first satisfying meal I have had for weeks? I cannot believe it, and I dare not ask the farmer's wife. I *will* not believe it until the pork is finished. He must have been sold. I am convinced of it. I hope he has found a happier, less hungry home, poor little chap. . . . I had an egg this morning that went off with a pop when I cracked it. I had a curious sensation when it happened. I have not hitherto been a believer in metempsychosis, but an intuition came to me at that moment that the soul of my little pig had entered into that egg. It would have been so like his whimsical, joking way to go off pop. And I was so hungry. . . . I have been writing a story of two men cast away in an open boat, with very striking patches of what one may call local colour. They suffered horribly from hunger. . . . The old hen has gone at last, and the farmer is still sharpening his knife. Why? Is he going to cut vegetables for me? I don't know where he will find them. In my story of the men in the open boat, one of them, driven to desperation. . . . Bread and cheese for dinner. Is this the lull before the storm? I surprised a curious expression in the farmer's eye this afternoon. He was sizing me up with an appraising look. I can't help feeling that he was mentally going through the process I described in my story after the stronger man had. . . . The farmer brought me my breakfast of bread and butter this morning. He says his wife is ill, that she is not getting up, that—I don't know what he said.

No! Definitely and finally, I cannot, I will not. . . ." (My notes end here.)

. . . . . .

After that last breakfast I went for a stroll in the yard, and in an outhouse I saw the farmer sharpening his knife. With an assumed nonchalance worthy of my little pig, I strolled carelessly to the gate; then, with tediously idle steps I sauntered towards the wood. And then—I ran. God, how I ran!

Ambrose Bierce

THE DAMNED THING

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§ 1: One Does Not Always Eat what is on the Table

. . . . . .

By the light of a tallow candle which had been placed on one end of a rough table a man was reading something written in a book. It was an old account-book, greatly worn; and the writing was not, apparently, very legible, for the man sometimes held the page close to the flame of the candle to get a stronger light on it. The shadow of the book would then throw into obscurity a half of the room, darkening a number of faces and figures; for besides the reader, eight other men were present. Seven of them sat against the rough log walls, silent, motionless, and the room being small, not very far from the table. By extending an arm anyone of them could have touched the eighth man, who lay on the table, face upward, partly covered by a sheet, his arms at his sides. He was dead.

The man with the book was not reading aloud, and no one spoke; all seemed to be waiting for something to occur; the dead man only was without expectation. From the blank darkness outside came in, through the aperture that served for a window, all the ever unfamiliar noises of night in the wilderness—the long nameless note of a distant coyote; the stilly pulsing thrill of tire-

less insects in trees; strange cries of night birds, so different from those of the birds of day; the drone of great blundering beetles, and all that mysterious chorus of small sounds that seem always to have been but half heard when they have suddenly ceased, as if conscious of an indiscretion. But nothing of all this was noted in that company; its members were not overmuch addicted to idle interest in matters of no practical importance; that was obvious in every line of their rugged faces—obvious even in the dim light of the single candle. They were evidently men of the vicinity —farmers and woodsmen.

The person reading was a trifle different; one would have said of him that he was of the world, worldly, albeit there was that in his attire which attested a certain fellowship with the organisms of his environment. His coat would hardly have passed muster in San Francisco; his foot-gear was not of urban origin, and the hat that lay by him on the floor (he was the only one uncovered) was such that if one had considered it as an article of mere personal adornment he would have missed its meaning. In countenance the man was rather prepossessing, with just a hint of sternness; though that he may have assumed or cultivated, as appropriate to one in authority. For he was a coroner. It was by virtue of his office that he had possession of the book in which he was reading; it had been found among the dead man's effects—in his cabin, where the inquest was now taking place.

When the coroner had finished reading he put the book into his breast-pocket. At that moment the door was pushed open and a young man entered. He, clearly, was not of mountain birth and breeding: he was clad as those who dwell in cities. His clothing was dusty, however, as from travel. He had, in fact, been riding hard to attend the inquest.

The coroner nodded; no one else greeted him.

"We have waited for you," said the coroner. "It is necessary to have done with this business to-night."

The young man smiled. "I am sorry to have kept you," he said. "I went away, not to evade your summons, but to post to my newspaper an account of what I suppose I am called back to relate."

The coroner smiled.

"The account that you posted to your newspaper," he said, "differs, probably, from that which you will give here under oath."

"That," replied the other, rather hotly and with a visible flush,

"is as you please. I used manifold paper and have a copy of what I sent. It was not written as news, for it is incredible, but as fiction. It may go as a part of my testimony under oath."

"But you say it is incredible."

"That is nothing to you, sir, if I also swear that it is true."

The coroner was silent for a time, his eyes upon the floor. The men about the sides of the cabin talked in whispers, but seldom withdrew their gaze from the face of the corpse. Presently the coroner lifted his eyes and said: "We will resume the inquest."

The men removed their hats. The witness was sworn.

"What is your name?" the coroner asked.

"William Harker."

"Age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"You knew the deceased, Hugh Morgan?"

"Yes."

"You were with him when he died?"

"Near him."

"How did that happen—your presence, I mean?"

"I was visiting him at this place to shoot and fish. A part of my purpose, however, was to study him and his odd, solitary way of life. He seemed a good model for a character in fiction. I sometimes write stories."

"I sometimes read them."

"Thank you."

"Stories in general—not yours."

Some of the jurors laughed. Against a sombre background humour shows high lights. Soldiers in the intervals of battle laugh easily, and a jest in the death-chamber conquers by surprise.

"Relate the circumstances of this man's death," said the coroner. "You may use any notes or memoranda that you please."

The witness understood. Pulling a manuscript from his breast-pocket he held it near the candle and turning the leaves until he found the passage that he wanted began to read.

§ 2: What may Happen in a Field of Wild Oats

. . . . . .

". . . The sun had hardly risen when we left the house. We were looking for quail, each with a shotgun, but we had only one dog. Morgan said that our best ground was beyond a certain ridge that he pointed out, and we crossed it by a trail through the

chaparral. On the other side was comparatively level ground, thickly covered with wild oats. As we emerged from the *chaparral* Morgan was but a few yards in advance. Suddenly we heard, at a little distance to our right and partly in front, a noise as of some animal thrashing about in the bushes, which we could see were violently agitated.

" 'We've started a deer,' I said, 'I wish we had brought a rifle.'

"Morgan, who had stopped and was intently watching the agitated *chaparral,* said nothing, but had cocked both barrels of his gun and was holding it in readiness to aim. I thought him a trifle excited, which surprised me, for he had a reputation for exceptional coolness, even in moments of sudden and imminent peril.

" 'Oh, come,' I said. 'You are not going to fill up a deer with quail-shot, are you?'

"Still he did not reply; but catching a sight of his face as he turned it slightly toward me I was struck by the intensity of his look. Then I understood that we had serious business in hand, and my first conjecture was that we had 'jumped' a grizzly. I advanced to Morgan's side, cocking my piece as I moved.

"The bushes were now quiet and the sounds had ceased, but Morgan was as attentive to the place as before.

" 'What is it? What the devil is it?' I asked.

" 'That Damned Thing!' he replied, without turning his head. His voice was husky and unnatural. He trembled visibly.

"I was about to speak further, when I observed the wild oats near the place of the disturbance moving in the most inexplicable way. I can hardly describe it. It seemed as if stirred by a streak of wind, which not only bent it, but pressed it down—crushed it so that it did not rise; and this movement was slowly prolonging itself directly toward us.

"Nothing that I had ever seen had affected me so strangely as this unfamiliar and unaccountable phenomenon, yet I am unable to recall any sense of fear. I remember—and tell it here because, singularly enough, I recollected it then—that once in looking carelessly out of an open window I momentarily mistook a small tree close at hand for one of a group of larger trees at a little distance away. It looked the same size as the others, but being more distinctly and sharply defined in mass and detail seemed out of harmony with them. It was a mere falsification of the law of aerial perspective, but it startled, almost terrified me. We so rely upon

the orderly operation of familiar natural laws that any seeming suspension of them is noted as a menace to our safety, a warning of unthinkable calamity. So now the apparently causeless movement of the herbiage and the slow, undeviating approach of the line of disturbance were distinctly disquieting. My companion appeared actually frightened, and I could hardly credit my senses when I saw him suddenly throw his gun to his shoulder and fire both barrels at the agitated grain! Before the smoke of the discharge had cleared away I heard a loud savage cry—a scream like that of a wild animal—and flinging his gun upon the ground Morgan sprang away and ran swiftly from the spot. At the same instant I was thrown violently to the ground by the impact of something unseen in the smoke—some soft, heavy substance that seemed thrown against me with great force.

"Before I could get upon my feet and recover my gun, which seemed to have been struck from my hands, I heard Morgan crying out as if in mortal agony, and mingling with his cries were such hoarse, savage sounds as one hears from fighting dogs. Inexpressibly terrified, I struggled to my feet and looked in the direction of Morgan's retreat; and may Heaven in mercy spare me from another sight like that! At a distance of less than thirty yards was my friend, down upon one knee, his head thrown back at a frightful angle, hatless, his long hair in disorder and his whole body in violent movement from side to side, backward and forward. His right arm was lifted and seemed to lack the hand—at least, I could see none. The other arm was invisible. At times, as my memory now reports this extraordinary scene, I could discern but a part of his body; it was as if he had been partly blotted out—I cannot otherwise express it—then a shifting of his position would bring it all into view again.

"All this must have occurred within a few seconds, yet in that time Morgan assumed all the postures of a determined wrestler vanquished by superior weight and strength. I saw nothing but him, and him not always distinctly. During the entire incident his shouts and curses were heard, as if through an enveloping uproar of such sounds of rage and fury as I had never heard from the throat of man or brute!

"For a moment only I stood irresolute, then throwing down my gun I ran forward to my friend's assistance. I had a vague belief that he was suffering from a fit, or some form of convulsion. Before I could reach his side he was down and quiet. All sounds had ceased, but with a feeling of such terror as even these awful

events had not inspired I now saw again the mysterious movement of the wild oats, prolonging itself from the trampled area about the prostrate man toward the edge of a wood. It was only when it had reached the wood that I was able to withdraw my eyes and look at my companion. He was dead."

§ 3: A Man though Naked may be in Rags

. . . . . .

The coroner rose from his seat and stood beside the dead man. Lifting an edge of the sheet he pulled it away, exposing the entire body, altogether naked and showing in the candlelight a clay-like yellow. It had, however, broad maculations of bluish black, obviously caused by extravasated blood from contusions. The chest and sides looked as if they had been beaten with a bludgeon. There were dreadful lacerations; the skin was torn in strips and shreds.

The coroner moved round to the end of the table and undid a silk handkerchief which had been passed under the chin and knotted on the top of the head. When the handkerchief was drawn away it exposed what had been the throat. Some of the jurors who had risen to get a better view repented their curiosity and turned away their faces. Witness Harker went to the open window and leaned out across the sill, faint and sick. Dropping the handkerchief upon the dead man's neck the coroner stepped to an angle of the room and from a pile of clothing produced one garment after another, each of which he held up a moment for inspection. All were torn, and stiff with blood. The jurors did not make a closer inspection. They seemed rather uninterested. They had, in truth, seen all this before; the only thing that was new to them being Harker's testimony.

"Gentlemen," the coroner said, "we have no more evidence, I think. Your duty has been already explained to you; if there is nothing you wish to ask you may go outside and consider your verdict."

The foreman rose—a tall, bearded man of sixty, coarsely clad.

"I should like to ask one question, Mr. Coroner," he said. "What asylum did this yer last witness escape from?"

"Mr. Harker," said the coroner gravely and tranquilly, "from what asylum did you last escape?"

Harker flushed crimson again, but said nothing, and the seven jurors rose and solemnly filed out of the cabin.

"If you have done insulting me, sir," said Harker, as soon as he and the officer were left alone with the dead man, "I suppose I am at liberty to go?"

"Yes."

Harker started to leave, but paused, with his hand on the door-latch. The habit of his profession was strong in him—stronger than his sense of personal dignity. He turned about and said:

"The book that you have there—I recognise it as Morgan's diary. You seemed greatly interested in it; you read in it while I was testifying. May I see it? The public would like——"

"The book will cut no figure in this matter," replied the official, slipping it into his coat pocket; "all the entries in it were made before the writer's death."

As Harker passed out of the house the jury re-entered and stood about the table, on which the now covered corpse showed under the sheet with sharp definition. The foreman seated himself near the candle, produced from his breast-pocket a pencil and scrap of paper and wrote rather laboriously the following verdict, which with various degrees of effort all signed:

"We, the jury, do find that the remains come to their death at the hands of a mountain lion, but some of us thinks, all the same, they had fits."

§ 4: An Explanation from the Tomb

. . . . . .

In the diary of the late Hugh Morgan are certain interesting entries having, possibly, a scientific value as suggestions. At the inquest upon his body the book was not put in evidence; possibly the coroner thought it not worth while to confuse the jury. The date of the first of the entries mentioned cannot be ascertained; the upper part of the leaf is torn away; the part of the entry remaining follows:

". . . would run in a half-circle, keeping his head turned always toward the centre, and again he would stand still, barking furiously. At last he ran away into the brush as fast as he could go. I thought at first that he had gone mad, but on returning to the house found no other alteration in his manner than what was obviously due to fear of punishment.

"Can a dog see with his nose? Do odours impress some cerebral centre with images of the thing that emitted them? . . .

"*Sept.* 2.—Looking at the stars last night as they rose above the

crest of the ridge east of the house, I observed them successively disappear—from left to right. Each was eclipsed but an instant, and only a few at the same time, but along the entire length of the ridge all that were within a degree or two of the crest were blotted out. It was as if something had passed along between me and them; but I could not see it, and the stars were not thick enough to define its outline. Ugh! don't like this." . . .

Several weeks' entries are missing, three leaves being torn from the book.

"*Sept.* 27.—It has been about here again—I find evidences of its presence every day. I watched again all last night in the same cover, gun in hand, double-charged with buckshot. In the morning the fresh footprints were there, as before. Yet I would have sworn that I did not sleep—indeed, I hardly sleep at all. It is terrible, insupportable! If these amazing experiences are real I shall go mad; if they are fanciful I am mad already.

"*Oct.* 3.—I shall not go—it shall not drive me away. No, this is *my* house, *my* land. God hates a coward. . . .

"*Oct.* 5.—I can stand it no longer; I have invited Harker to pass a few weeks with me—he has a level head. I can judge from his manner if he thinks me mad.

"*Oct.* 7.—I have the solution of the mystery; it came to me last night—suddenly, as by revelation. How simple—how terribly simple!

"There are sounds that we cannot hear. At either end of the scale are notes that stir no chord of that imperfect instrument, the human ear. They are too high or too grave. I have observed a flock of blackbirds occupying an entire tree-top—the tops of several trees—and all in full song. Suddenly—in a moment—at absolutely the same instant—all spring into the air and fly away. How? They could not all see one another—whole tree-tops intervened. At no point could a leader have been visible to all. There must have been a signal of warning or command, high and shrill above the din, but by me unheard. I have observed, too, the same simultaneous flight when all were silent, among not only blackbirds, but other birds—quail, for example, widely separated by bushes—even on opposite sides of a hill.

"It is known to seamen that a school of whales basking or sporting on the surface of the ocean, miles apart, with the convexity of the earth between, will sometimes dive at the same instant—all gone out of sight in a moment. The signal has been sounded—too grave for the ear of the sailor at the masthead and

his comrades on the deck—who nevertheless feel its vibrations in the ship as the stones of a cathedral are stirred by the bass of the organ.

"As with sounds, so with colours. At each end of the solar spectrum the chemist can detect the presence of what are known as 'actinic' rays. They represent colours—integral colours in the composition of light—which we are unable to discern. The human eye is an imperfect instrument; its range is but a few octaves of the real 'chromatic scale.' I am not mad; here are colours that we cannot see.

"And, God help me! the Damned Thing is of such a colour!"

Algernon Blackwood

SECRET WORSHIP

Taken, with permission, from *John Silence,* by Algernon Blackwood, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Harris, the silk merchant, was in South Germany on his way home from a business trip when the idea came to him suddenly that he would take the mountain railway from Strassbourg and run down to revisit his old school after an interval of something more than thirty years. And it was to this chance impulse of the junior partner in Harris Brothers of St. Paul's Churchyard that John Silence owed one of the most curious cases of his whole experience, for at that very moment he happened to be tramping these same mountains with a holiday knapsack, and from different points of the compass the two men were actually converging towards the same inn.

Now, deep down in the heart that for thirty years had been concerned chiefly with the profitable buying and selling of silk, this school had left the imprint of its peculiar influence, and, though perhaps unknown to Harris, had strongly coloured the whole of his subsequent existence. It belonged to the deeply religious life of a small Protestant community (which it is unnecessary to specify), and his father had sent him there at the age of fifteen, partly because he would learn the German requisite for the conduct of the silk business, and partly because the dis-

cipline was strict, and discipline was what his soul and body needed just then more than anything else.

The life, indeed, had proved exceedingly severe, and young Harris benefited accordingly; for though corporal punishment was unknown, there was a system of mental and spiritual correction which somehow made the soul stand proudly erect to receive it, while it struck at the very root of the fault and taught the boy that his character was being cleaned and strengthened, and that he was not merely being tortured in a kind of personal revenge.

That was over thirty years ago, when he was a dreamy and impressionable youth of fifteen; and now, as the train climbed slowly up the winding mountain gorges, his mind travelled back somewhat lovingly over the intervening period, and forgotten details rose vividly again before him out of the shadows. The life there had been very wonderful, it seemed to him, in that remote mountain village, protected from the tumults of the world by the love and worship of the devout Brotherhood that ministered to the needs of some hundred boys from every country in Europe. Sharply the scenes came back to him. He smelt again the long stone corridors, the hot pinewood rooms, where the sultry hours of summer study were passed with bees droning through open windows in the sunshine, and German characters struggling in the mind with dreams of English lawns—and then the sudden awful cry of the master in German—

"Harris, stand up! You sleep!"

And he recalled the dreadful standing motionless for an hour, book in hand, while the knees felt like wax and the head grew heavier than a cannon-ball.

The very smell of the cooking came back to him—the daily *Sauerkraut,* the watery chocolate on Sundays, the flavour of the stringy meat served twice a week at *Mittagessen*; and he smiled to think again of the half-rations that was the punishment for speaking English. The very odour of the milk-bowls—the hot sweet aroma that rose from the soaking peasant-bread at the six-o'clock breakfast—came back to him pungently, and he saw the huge *Speiseaal* with the hundred boys in their school uniform, all eating sleepily in silence, gulping down the coarse bread and scalding milk in terror of the bell that would presently cut them short—and, at the far end where the masters sat, he saw the narrow slit windows with the vistas of enticing field and forest beyond.

And this, in turn, made him think of the great barn-like room on the top floor where all slept together in wooden cots, and he heard in memory the clamour of the cruel bell that woke them on winter mornings at five o'clock and summoned them to the stone-flagged *Waschkammer,* where boys and masters alike, after scanty and icy washing, dressed in complete silence.

From this his mind passed swiftly, with vivid picture-thoughts, to other things, and with a passing shiver he remembered how the loneliness of never being alone had eaten into him, and how everything—work, meals, sleep, walks, leisure—was done with his "division" of twenty other boys and under the eyes of at least two masters. The only solitude possible was by asking for half an hour's practice in the cell-like music rooms, and Harris smiled to himself as he recalled the zeal of his violin studies.

Then, as the train puffed laboriously through the great pine forests that cover these mountains with a giant carpet of velvet, he found the pleasanter layers of memory giving up their dead, and he recalled with admiration the kindness of the masters, whom all addressed as Brother, and marvelled afresh at their devotion in burying themselves for years in such a place, only to leave it, in most cases, for the still rougher life of missionaries in the wild places of the world.

He thought once more of the still, religious atmosphere that hung over the little forest community like a veil, barring the distressful world; of the picturesque ceremonies at Easter, Christmas, and New Year; of the numerous feast-days and charming little festivals. The *Beschehr-Fest,* in particular, came back to him—the feast of gifts at Christmas—when the entire community paired off and gave presents, many of which had taken weeks to make or the savings of many days to purchase. And then he saw the midnight ceremony in the church at New Year, with the shining face of the *Prediger* in the pulpit—the village preacher who, on the last night of the old year, saw in the empty gallery beyond the organ loft the faces of all who were to die in the ensuing twelve months, and who at last recognised himself among them, and, in the very middle of his sermon, passed into a state of rapt ecstasy and burst into a torrent of praise.

Thickly the memories crowded upon him. The picture of the small village dreaming its unselfish life on the mountain-tops, clean, wholesome, simple, searching vigorously for its God, and training hundreds of boys in the grand way, rose up in his mind with all the power of an obsession. He felt once more the old

mystical enthusiasm, deeper than the sea and more wonderful than the stars; he heard again the winds sighing from leagues of forest over the red roofs in the moonlight; he heard the Brothers' voices talking of the things beyond this life as though they had actually experienced them in the body; and, as he sat in the jolting train, a spirit of unutterable longing passed over his seared and tired soul, stirring in the depths of him a sea of emotions that he thought had long since frozen into immobility.

And the contrast pained him—the idealistic dreamer then, the man of business now—so that a spirit of unworldly peace and beauty known only to the soul in meditation laid its feathered finger upon his heart, moving strangely the surface of the waters.

Harris shivered a little and looked out of the window of his empty carriage. The train had long passed Hornberg, and far below the streams tumbled in white foam down the limestone rocks. In front of him, dome upon dome of wooded mountains stood against the sky. It was October, and the air was cool and sharp, wood-smoke and damp moss exquisitely mingled in it with the subtle odours of the pines. Overhead, between the tips of the highest firs, he saw the first stars peeping, and the sky was a clean, pale amethyst that seemed exactly the colour all these memories clothed themselves with in his mind.

He leaned back in his corner and sighed. He was a heavy man, and he had not known sentiment for years; he was a big man, and it took much to move him, literally and figuratively; he was a man in whom the dreams of God that haunt the soul in youth, though overlaid by the scum that gathers in the fight for money, had not, as with the majority, utterly died the death.

He came back into this little neglected pocket of the years where so much fine gold had collected and lain undisturbed, with all his semi-spiritual emotions aquiver; and, as he watched the mountain-tops come nearer, and smelt the forgotten odours of his boyhood, something melted on the surface of his soul and left him sensitive to a degree he had not known since, thirty years before, he had lived here with his dreams, his conflicts, and his youthful suffering.

A thrill ran through him as the train stopped with a jolt at a tiny station and he saw the name in large black lettering on the grey stone building, and below it, the number of metres it stood above the level of the sea.

"The highest point on the line!" he exclaimed. "How well

I remember it—Sommerau—Summer Meadow. The very next station is mine!"

And, as the train ran downhill with brakes on and steam shut off, he put his head out of the window and one by one saw the old familiar landmarks in the dusk. They stared at him like dead faces in a dream. Queer, sharp feelings, half poignant, half sweet, stirred in his heart.

"There's the hot, white road we walked along so often with the two Brüder always at our heels," he thought; "and there, by Jove, is the turn through the forest to '*Die Galgen*,' the stone gallows where they hanged the witches in olden days!"

He smiled a little as the train slid past.

"And there's the copse where the Lilies of the Valley powdered the ground in spring; and, I swear"—he put his head out with a sudden impulse—"if that's not the very clearing where Calame, the French boy, chased the swallow-tail with me, and Brüder Pagel gave us half-rations for leaving the road without permission, and for shouting in our mother tongues!" And he laughed again as the memories came back with a rush, flooding his mind with vivid detail.

The train stopped, and he stood on the grey gravel platform like a man in a dream. It seemed half a century since he last waited there with corded wooden boxes, and got into the train for Strassbourg and home after the two years' exile. Time dropped from him like an old garment and he felt a boy again. Only, things looked so much smaller than his memory of them; shrunk and dwindled they looked, and the distances seemed on a curiously smaller scale.

He made his way across the road to the little Gasthaus, and, as he went, faces and figures of former schoolfellows—German, Swiss, Italian, French, Russian—slipped out of the shadowy woods and silently accompanied him. They flitted by his side, raising their eyes questioningly, sadly, to his. But their names he had forgotten. Some of the Brothers, too, came with them, and most of these he remembered by name—Brüder Röst, Brüder Pagel, Brüder Schliemann, and the bearded face of the old preacher who had seen himself in the haunted gallery of those about to die—Brüder Gysin. The dark forest lay all about him like a sea that any moment might rush with velvet waves upon the scene and sweep all the faces away. The air was cool and wonderfully fragrant, but with every perfumed breath came also a pallid memory. . . .

Yet, in spite of the underlying sadness inseparable from such an experience, it was all very interesting, and held a pleasure peculiarly its own, so that Harris engaged his room and ordered supper feeling well pleased with himself, and intending to walk up to the old school that very evening. It stood in the centre of the community's village, some four miles distant through the forest, and he now recollected for the first time that this little Protestant settlement dwelt isolated in a section of the country that was otherwise Catholic. Crucifixes and shrines surrounded the clearing like the sentries of a beleaguering army. Once beyond the square of the village, with its few acres of field and orchard, the forest crowded up in solid phalanxes, and beyond the rim of trees began the country that was ruled by the priests of another faith. He vaguely remembered, too, that the Catholics had showed sometimes a certain hostility towards the little Protestant oasis that flourished so quietly and benignly in their midst. He had quite forgotten this. How trumpery it all seemed now with his wide experience of life and his knowledge of other countries and the great outside world. It was like stepping back, not thirty years, but three hundred.

There were only two others besides himself at supper. One of them, a bearded, middle-aged man in tweeds, sat by himself at the far end, and Harris kept out of his way because he was English. He feared he might be in business, possibly even in the silk business, and that he would perhaps talk on the subject. The other traveller, however, was a Catholic priest. He was a little man who ate his salad with a knife, yet so gently that it was almost inoffensive, and it was the sight of "the cloth" that recalled his memory of the old antagonism. Harris mentioned by way of conversation the object of his sentimental journey, and the priest looked up sharply at him with raised eyebrows and an expression of surprise and suspicion that somehow piqued him. He ascribed it to his difference of belief.

"Yes," went on the silk merchant, pleased to talk of what his mind was so full, "and it was a curious experience for an English boy to be dropped down into a school of a hundred foreigners. I well remember the loneliness and intolerable Heimweh of it at first." His German was very fluent.

The priest opposite looked up from his cold veal and potato salad and smiled. It was a nice face. He explained quietly that he did not belong here, but was making a tour of the parishes of Württemberg and Baden.

"It was a strict life," added Harris. "We English, I remember, used to call it *Gefängnisleben*—prison life!"

The face of the other, for some unaccountable reason, darkened. After a slight pause, and more by way of politeness than because he wished to continue the subject, he said quietly:

"It was a flourishing school in those days, of course. Afterwards, I have heard——" He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and the odd look—it almost seemed a look of alarm—came back into his eyes. The sentence remained unfinished.

Something in the tone of the man seemed to his listener uncalled for—in a sense reproachful, singular. Harris bridled in spite of himself.

"It has changed?" he asked. "I can hardly believe——"

"You have not heard, then?" observed the priest gently, making a gesture as though to cross himself, yet not actually completing it. "You have not heard what happened there before it was abandoned——?"

It was very childish, of course, and perhaps he was overtired and overwrought in some way, but the words and manner of the little priest seemed to him so offensive—so disproportionately offensive—that he hardly noticed the concluding sentence. He recalled the old bitterness and the old antagonism, and for a moment he almost lost his temper.

"Nonsense," he interrupted with a forced laugh, "*Unsinn!* You must forgive me, sir, for contradicting you. But I was a pupil there myself. I was at school there. There was no place like it. I cannot believe that anything serious could have happened to—to take away its character. The devotion of the Brothers would be difficult to equal anywhere——"

He broke off suddenly, realising that his voice had been raised unduly and that the man at the far end of the table might understand German; and at the same moment he looked up and saw that this individual's eyes were fixed upon his face intently. They were peculiarly bright. Also they were rather wonderful eyes, and the way they met his own served in some way he could not understand to convey both a reproach and a warning. The whole face of the stranger, indeed, made a vivid impression upon him, for it was a face, he now noticed for the first time, in whose presence one would not willingly have said or done anything unworthy. Harris could not explain to himself how it was he had not become conscious sooner of its presence.

But he could have bitten off his tongue for having so far forgotten himself. The little priest lapsed into silence. Only once he said, looking up and speaking in a low voice that was not intended to be overheard, but that evidently *was* overheard, "You will find it different." Presently he rose and left the table with a polite bow that included both the others, and, after him, from the far end rose also the figure in the tweed suit, leaving Harris by himself.

He sat on for a bit in the darkening room, sipping his coffee and smoking his fifteen-pfennig cigar, till the girl came in to light the oil lamps. He felt vexed with himself for his lapse from good manners, yet hardly able to account for it. Most likely, he reflected, he had been annoyed because the priest had unintentionally changed the pleasant character of his dream by introducing a jarring note. Later he must seek an opportunity to make amends. At present, however, he was too impatient for his walk to the school, and he took his stick and hat and passed out into the open air.

And, as he crossed before the Gasthaus, he noticed that the priest and the man in the tweed suit were engaged already in such deep conversation that they hardly noticed him as he passed and raised his hat.

He started off briskly, well remembering the way, and hoping to reach the village in time to have a word with one of the Brüder. They might even ask him in for a cup of coffee. He felt sure of his welcome, and the old memories were in full possession once more. The hour of return was a matter of no consequence whatever.

It was then just after seven o'clock, and the October evening was drawing in with chill airs from the recesses of the forest. The road plunged straight from the railway clearing into its depths, and in a very few minutes the trees engulfed him and the clack of his boots fell dead and echoless against the serried stems of a million firs. It was very black; one trunk was hardly distinguishable from another. He walked smartly, swinging his holly stick. Once or twice he passed a peasant on his way to bed, and the guttural "Gruss Got," unheard for so long, emphasised the passage of time, while yet making it seem as nothing. A fresh group of pictures crowded his mind. Again the figures of former schoolfellows flitted out of the forest and kept pace by his side, whispering of the doings of long ago. One reverie stepped hard upon the heels of another. Every turn in the road, every clearing

of the forest, he knew, and each in turn brought forgotten associations to life. He enjoyed himself thoroughly.

He marched on and on. There was powdered gold in the sky till the moon rose, and then a wind of faint silver spread silently between the earth and stars. He saw the tips of the fir trees shimmer, and heard them whisper as the breeze turned their needles towards the light. The mountain air was indescribably sweet. The road shone like the foam of a river through the gloom. White moths flitted here and there like silent thoughts across his path, and a hundred smells greeted him from the forest caverns across the years.

Then, when he least expected it, the trees fell away abruptly on both sides, and he stood on the edge of the village clearing.

He walked faster. There lay the familiar outlines of the houses, sheeted with silver; there stood the trees in the little central square with the fountain and small green lawns; there loomed the shape of the church next to the Gasthof der Brüdergemeinde; and just beyond, dimly rising into the sky, he saw with a sudden thrill the mass of the huge school building, blocked castle-like with deep shadows in the moonlight, standing square and formidable to face him after the silences of more than a quarter of a century.

He passed quickly down the deserted village street and stopped close beneath its shadow, staring up at the walls that had once held him prisoner for two years—two unbroken years of discipline and homesickness. Memories and emotions surged through his mind; for the most vivid sensations of his youth had focused about this spot, and it was here he had first begun to live and learn values. Not a single footstep broke the silence, though lights glimmered here and there through cottage windows; but when he looked up at the high walls of the school, draped now in shadow, he easily imagined that well-known faces crowded to the windows to greet him—closed windows that really reflected only moonlight and the gleam of stars.

This, then, was the old school building, standing foursquare to the world, with its shuttered windows, its lofty, tiled roof, and the spiked lightning-conductors pointing like black and taloned fingers from the corners. For a long time he stood and stared. Then, presently, he came to himself again, and realised to his joy that a light still shone in the windows of the *Brüderstube*.

He turned from the road and passed through the iron railings; then climbed the twelve stone steps and stood facing the black

wooden door with the heavy bars of iron, a door he had once loathed and dreaded with the hatred and passion of an imprisoned soul, but now looked upon tenderly with a sort of boyish delight.

Almost timorously he pulled the rope and listened with a tremor of excitement to the clanging of the bell deep within the building. And the long-forgotten sound brought the past before him with such a vivid sense of reality that he positively shivered. It was like the magic bell in the fairy-tale that rolls back the curtain of Time and summons the figures from the shadows of the dead. He had never felt so sentimental in his life. It was like being young again. And, at the same time, he began to bulk rather large in his own eyes with a certain spurious importance. He was a big man from the world of strife and action. In this little place of peaceful dreams would he, perhaps, not cut something of a figure?

"I'll try once more," he thought after a long pause, seizing the iron bell-rope, and was just about to pull it when a step sounded on the stone passage within, and the huge door slowly swung open.

A tall man with a rather severe cast of countenance stood facing him in silence.

"I must apologize—it is somewhat late," he began a trifle pompously, "but the fact is I am an old pupil. I have only just arrived and really could not restrain myself." His German seemed not quite so fluent as usual. "My interest is so great. I was here in '70."

The other opened the door wider and at once bowed him in with a smile of genuine welcome.

"I am Brüder Kalkmann," he said quietly in a deep voice. "I myself was a master here about that time. It is a great pleasure always to welcome a former pupil." He looked at him very keenly for a few seconds, and then added, "I think, too, it is splendid of you to come—very splendid."

"It is a very great pleasure," Harris replied, delighted with his reception.

The dimly-lighted corridor with its flooring of grey stone, and the familiar sound of a German voice echoing through it—with the peculiar intonation the Brothers always used in speaking—all combined to lift him bodily, as it were, into the dream-atmosphere of long-forgotten days. He stepped gladly into the building and the door shut with the familiar thunder that completed the recon-

struction of the past. He almost felt the old sense of imprisonment, of aching nostalgia, of having lost his liberty.

Harris sighed involuntarily and turned towards his host, who returned his smile faintly and then led the way down the corridor.

"The boys have retired," he explained, "and, as you remember, we keep early hours here. But, at least, you will join us for a little while in the *Brüderstube* and enjoy a cup of coffee." This was precisely what the silk merchant had hoped, and he accepted with an alacrity that he intended to be tempered by graciousness. "And to-morrow," continued the Brüder, "you must come and spend a whole day with us. You may even find acquaintances, for several pupils of your day have come back here as masters."

For one brief second there passed into the man's eyes a look that made the visitor start. But it vanished as quickly as it came. It was impossible to define. Harris convinced himself it was the effect of a shadow cast by the lamp they had just passed on the wall. He dismissed it from his mind.

"You are very kind, I'm sure," he said politely. "It is perhaps a greater pleasure to me than you can imagine to see the place again. Ah"—he stopped short opposite a door with the upper half of glass and peered in—"surely there is one of the music rooms where I used to practise the violin. How it comes back to me after all these years!"

Brüder Kalkmann stopped indulgently, smiling, to allow his guest a moment's inspection.

"You still have the boy's orchestra? I remember I used to play '*zweite Geige*' in it. Brüder Schliemann conducted at the piano. Dear me, I can see him now with his long black hair and—and——" He stopped abruptly. Again the odd, dark look passed over the stern face of his companion. For an instant it seemed curiously familiar.

"We still keep up the pupils' orchestra," he said, "but Brüder Schliemann, I am sorry to say——" he hesitated an instant, and then added, "Brüder Schliemann is dead."

"Indeed, indeed," said Harris quickly. "I am sorry to hear it." He was conscious of a faint feeling of distress, but whether it arose from the news of his old music teacher's death, or—from something else—he could not quite determine. He gazed down the corridor that lost itself among shadows. In the street and village everything had seemed so much smaller than he remembered, but here, inside the school building, everything seemed so

much bigger. The corridor was loftier and longer, more spacious and vast, than the mental picture he had preserved. His thoughts wandered dreamily for an instant.

He glanced up and saw the face of the Brüder watching him with a smile of patient indulgence.

"Your memories possess you," he observed gently, and the stern look passed into something almost pitying.

"You are right," returned the man of silk, "they do. This was the most wonderful period of my whole life in a sense. At the time I hated it——" He hesitated, not wishing to hurt the Brother's feelings.

"According to English ideas it seemed strict, of course," the other said persuasively, so that he went on.

"—— Yes, partly that; and partly the ceaseless nostalgia, and the solitude which came from never being really alone. In English schools the boys enjoy peculiar freedom, you know."

Brüder Kalkmann, he saw, was listening intently.

"But it produced one result that I have never wholly lost," he continued self-consciously, "and am grateful for."

"Ach! Wie so, denn!"

"The constant inner pain threw me headlong into your religious life, so that the whole force of my being seemed to project itself towards the search for a deeper satisfaction—a real resting-place for the soul. During my two years here I yearned for God in my boyish way as perhaps I have never yearned for anything since. Moreover, I have never quite lost that sense of peace and inward joy which accompanied the search. I can never quite forget this school and the deep things it taught me."

He paused at the end of his long speech, and a brief silence fell between them. He feared he had said too much, or expressed himself clumsily in the foreign language, and when Brüder Kalkmann laid a hand upon his shoulder, he gave a little involuntary start.

"So that my memories perhaps do possess me rather strongly," he added apologetically; "and this long corridor, these rooms, that barred and gloomy front door, all touch chords that—that——" His German failed him and he glanced at his companion with an explanatory smile and gesture. But the Brother had removed hand from his shoulder and was standing with his back to him, looking down the passage.

"Naturally, naturally so," he said hastily without turning round. *"Es ist doch selbstverständlich.* We shall all understand."

Then he turned suddenly, and Harris saw that his face had turned most oddly and disagreeably sinister. It may only have been the shadows again playing their tricks with the wretched oil lamps on the wall, for the dark expression passed instantly as they retraced their steps down the corridor, but the Englishman somehow got the impression that he had said something to give offence, something that was not quite to the other's taste. Opposite the door of the *Brüderstube* they stopped. Harris realised that it was late and he had possibly steady talking too long. He made a tentative effort to leave, but his companion would not hear of it.

"You must have a cup of coffee with us," he said firmly as though he meant it, "and my colleagues will be delighted to see you. Some of them will remember you, perhaps."

The sound of voices came pleasantly through the door, men's voices talking together. Brüder Kalkmann turned the handle and they entered a room ablaze with light and full of people.

"Ah—but your name?" he whispered, bending down to catch the reply; "you have not told me your name yet."

"Harris," said the Englishman quickly as they went in. He felt nervous as he crossed the threshold, but ascribed the momentary trepidation to the fact that he was breaking the strictest rule of the whole establishment, which forbade a boy under severest penalties to come near this holy of holies where the masters took their brief leisure.

"Ah, yes, of course—Harris," repeated the other as though he remembered it. "Come in, Herr Harris, come in, please. Your visit will be immensely appreciated. It is really very fine, very wonderful of you to have come in this way."

The door closed behind them and, in the sudden light which made his sight swim for a moment, the exaggeration of the language escaped his attention. He heard the voice of Brüder Kalkmann introducing him. He spoke very loud, indeed, unnecessarily—absurdly loud, Harris thought.

"Brothers," he announced, "it is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you Herr Harris from England. He has just arrived to make us a little visit, and I have already expressed to him on behalf of us all the satisfaction we feel that he is here. He was, as you remember, a pupil in the year '70."

It was a very formal, a very German introduction, but Harris rather liked it. It made him feel important and he appreciated the tact that made it almost seem as though he had been expected.

The black forms rose and bowed; Harris bowed; Kalkmann

bowed. Everyone was very polite and very courtly. The room swam with moving figures; the light dazzled him after the gloom of the corridor; there was thick cigar smoke in the atmosphere. He took the chair that was offered to him between two of the Brothers, and sat down, feeling vaguely that his perceptions were not quite as keen and accurate as usual. He felt a trifle dazed perhaps, and the spell of the past came strongly over him, confusing the immediate present and making everything dwindle oddly to the dimensions of long ago. He seemed to pass under the mastery of a great mood that was a composite reproduction of all the moods of his forgotten boyhood.

Then he pulled himself together with a sharp effort and entered into the conversation that had begun again to buzz round him. Moreover, he entered into it with keen pleasure, for the Brothers —there were perhaps a dozen of them in the little room—treated him with a charm of manner that speedily made him feel one of themselves. This, again, was a very subtle delight to him. He felt that he had stepped out of the greedy, vulgar, self-seeking world, the world of silk and markets and profit-making—stepped into the cleaner atmosphere where spiritual ideals were paramount and life was simple and devoted. It all charmed him inexpressibly, so that he realised—yes, in a sense—the degradation of his twenty years' absorption in business. This keen atmosphere under the stars where men thought only of their souls, and of the souls of others, was too rarefied for the world he was now associated with. He found himself making comparisons to his own disadvantage,—comparisons with the mystical little dreamer that had stepped thirty years before from the stern peace of this devout community, and the man of the world that he had since become —and the contrast made him shiver with a keen regret and something like self-contempt.

He glanced round at the other faces floating towards him through tobacco smoke—this acrid cigar smoke he remembered so well: how keen they were, how strong, placid, touched with the nobility of great aims and unselfish purposes. At one or two he looked particularly. He hardly knew why. They rather fascinated him. There was something so very stern and uncompromising about them, and something, too, oddly, subtly, familiar, that yet just eluded him. But whenever their eyes met his own they held undeniable welcome in them; and some held more— a kind of perplexed admiration, he thought, something that was

between esteem and deference. This note of respect in all the faces was very flattering to his vanity.

Coffee was served presently, made by a black-haired Brother who sat in the corner by the piano and bore a marked resemblance to Brüder Schliemann, the musical director of thirty years ago. Harris exchanged bows with him when he took the cup from his white hands, which he noticed were like the hands of a woman. He lit a cigar, offered to him by his neighbour, with whom he was chatting delightfully, and who, in the glare of the lighted match, reminded him sharply for a moment of Brüder Pagel, his former room-master.

"*Es ist wirklich merkwürdig,*" he said, "how many resemblances I see, or imagine. It is really *very* curious!"

"Yes," replied the other, peering at him over his coffee cup, "the spell of the place is wonderfully strong. I can well understand that the old faces rise before your mind's eye—almost to the exclusion of ourselves perhaps."

They both laughed pleasantly. It was soothing to find his mood understood and appreciated. And they passed on to talk of the mountain village, its isolation, its remoteness from worldly life, its peculiar fitness for meditation and worship, and for spiritual development—of a certain kind.

"And your coming back in this way, Herr Harris, has pleased us all so much," joined in the Brüder on his left. "We esteem you for it most highly. We honour you for it."

Harris made a deprecating gesture. "I fear, for my part, it is only a very selfish pleasure," he said a trifle unctuously.

"Not all would have had the courage," added the one who resembled Brüder Pagel.

"You mean," said Harris, a little puzzled, "the disturbing memories——?"

Brüder Pagel looked at him steadily, with unmistakable admiration and respect. "I mean that most men hold so strongly to life, and can give up so little for their beliefs," he said gravely.

The Englishman felt slightly uncomfortable. These worthy men really made too much of his sentimental journey. Besides, the talk was getting a little out of his depth. He hardly followed it.

"The worldly life still has *some* charms for me," he replied smilingly, as though to indicate that sainthood was not yet quite within his grasp.

"All the more, then, must we honour you for so freely coming," said the Brother on his left; "so unconditionally!"

A pause followed, and the silk merchant felt relieved when the conversation took a more general turn, although he noted that it never travelled very far from the subject of his visit and the wonderful situation of the lonely village for men who wished to develop their spiritual powers and practise the rites of a high worship. Others joined in, complimenting him on his knowledge of the language, making him feel utterly at his ease, yet at the same time a little uncomfortable by the excess of their admiration. After all, it was such a very small thing to do, this sentimental journey.

The time passed along quickly; the coffee was excellent, the cigars soft and of the nutty flavour he loved. At length, fearing to outstay his welcome, he rose reluctantly to take his leave. But the others would not hear of it. It was not often a former pupil returned to visit them in this simple, unaffected way. The night was young. If necessary they could even find him a corner in the great *Schlafzimmer* upstairs. He was easily persuaded to stay a little longer. Somehow he had become the centre of the little party. He felt pleased, flattered, honoured.

"And perhaps Brüder Schliemann will play something for us —now."

It was Kalkmann speaking, and Harris started visibly as he heard the name, and saw the black-haired man by the piano turn with a smile. For Schliemann was the name of his old music director, who was dead. Could this be his son? They were so exactly alike.

"If Brüder Meyer has not put his Amati to bed, I will accompany him," said the musician suggestively, looking across at a man whom Harris had not yet noticed, and who, he now saw, was the very image of a former master of that name.

Meyer rose and excused himself with a little bow, and the Englishman quickly observed that he had a peculiar gesture as though his neck had a false join on to the body just below the collar and feared it might break. Meyer of old had this trick of movement. He remembered how the boys used to copy it.

He glanced sharply from face to face, feeling as though some silent, unseen process were changing everything about him. All the faces seemed oddly familiar. Pagel, the Brother he had been talking with, was of course the image of Pagel, his former room-master; and Kalkmann, he now realised for the first time, was

the very twin of another master whose name he had quite forgotten, but whom he used to dislike intensely in the old days. And, through the smoke, peering at him from the corners of the room, he saw that all the Brothers about him had the faces he had known and lived with long ago—Röst, Fluheim, Meinert, Rigel, Gysin.

He stared hard, suddenly grown more alert, and everywhere saw, or fancied he saw, strange likenesses, ghostly resemblances —more, the identical faces of years ago. There was something queer about it all, something not quite right, something that made him feel uneasy. He shook himself, mentally and actually, blowing the smoke from before his eyes with a long breath, and as he did so he noticed to his dismay that every one was fixedly staring. They were watching him.

This brought him to his senses. As an Englishman, and a foreigner, he did not wish to be rude, or to do anything to make himself foolishly conspicuous and spoil the harmony of the evening. He was a guest, and a privileged guest at that. Besides, the music had already begun. Brüder Schliemann's long white fingers were caressing the keys to some purpose.

He subsided into his chair and smoked with half-closed eyes that yet saw everything.

But the shudder had established itself in his being, and, whether he would or not, it kept repeating itself. As a town, far up some inland river, feels the pressure of the distant sea, so he became aware that mighty forces from somewhere beyond his ken were urging themselves up against his soul in this smoky little room. He began to feel exceedingly ill at ease.

And as the music filled the air his mind began to clear. Like a lifted veil there rose up something that had hitherto obscured his vision. The words of the priest at the railway inn flashed across his brain unbidden: "You will find it different." And also, though why he could not tell, he saw mentally the strong, rather wonderful eyes of that other guest at the supper-table, the man who had overheard his conversation, and had later got into earnest talk with the priest. He took out his watch and stole a glance at it. Two hours had slipped by. It was already eleven o'clock.

Schliemann, meanwhile, utterly absorbed in his music, was playing a solemn measure. The piano sang marvellously. The power of a great conviction, the simplicity of great art, the vital spiritual message of a soul that had found itself—all this, and more, were in the chords, and yet somehow the music was what

can only be described as impure—atrociously and diabolically impure. And the piece itself, although Harris did not recognise it as anything familiar, was surely the music of a Mass—huge, majestic, sombre? It stalked through the smoky room with slow power, like the passage of something that was mighty, yet profoundly intimate, and as it went there stirred into each and every face about him the signature of the enormous forces of which it was the audible symbol. The countenances round him turned sinister, but not idly, negatively sinister: they grew dark with purpose. He suddenly recalled the face of Brüder Kalkmann in the corridor earlier in the evening. The motives of their secret souls rose to the eyes, and mouths, and foreheads, and hung there for all to see like the black banners of an assembly of ill-starred and fallen creatures. Demons—was the horrible word that flashed through his brain like a sheet of fire.

When this sudden discovery leaped out upon him, for a moment he lost his self-control. Without waiting to think and weigh his extraordinary impression, he did a very foolish but a very natural thing. Feeling himself irresistibly driven by the sudden stress to some kind of action, he sprang to his feet—and screamed! To his own utter amazement he stood up and shrieked aloud!

But no one stirred. No one, apparently, took the slightest notice of his absurdly wild behaviour. It was almost as if no one but himself had heard the scream at all—as though the music had drowned it and swallowed it up—as though after all perhaps he had not really screamed as loudly as he imagined, or had not screamed at all.

Then, as he glanced at the motionless, dark faces before him, something of utter cold passed into his being, touching his very soul. . . . All emotion cooled suddenly, leaving him like a receding tide. He sat down again, ashamed, mortified, angry with himself for behaving like a fool and a boy. And the music, meanwhile, continued to issue from the white and snake-like fingers of Brüder Schliemann, as poisoned wine might issue from the weirdly-fashioned necks of antique phials.

And, with the rest of them, Harris drank it in.

Forcing himself to believe that he had been the victim of some kind of illusory perception, he vigorously restrained his feelings. Then the music presently ceased, and every one applauded and began to talk at once, laughing, changing seats, complimenting the player and behaving naturally and easily as though nothing

out of the way had happened. The faces appeared normal once more. The Brothers crowded round their visitor, and he joined in their talk and even heard himself thanking the gifted musician.

But, at the same time, he found himself edging towards the door, nearer and nearer, changing his chair when possible, and joining the groups that stood closest to the way of escape.

"I must thank you all *tausendmal* for my little reception and the great pleasure—the very great honour you have done me," he began in decided tones at length, "but I fear I have trespassed far too long already on your hospitality. Moreover, I have some distance to walk to my inn."

A chorus of voices greeted his words. They would not hear of his going—at least not without first partaking of refreshment. They produced pumpernickel from one cupboard, and rye-bread and sausage from another, and all began to talk again and eat. More coffee was made, fresh cigars lighted, and Brüder Meyer took out his violin and began to tune it softly.

"There is always a bed upstairs if Herr Harris will accept it," said one.

"And it is difficult to find the way out now, for all the doors are locked," laughed another loudly.

"Let us take our simple pleasures as they come," cried a third. "Brüder Harris will understand how we appreciate the honour of this last visit of his."

They made a dozen excuses. They all laughed, as though the politeness of their words was but formal, and veiled thinly—more and more thinly—a very different meaning.

"And the hour of midnight draws near," added Brüder Kalkmann with a charming smile, but in a voice that sounded to the Englishman like the grating of iron hinges.

Their German seemed to him more and more difficult to understand. He noted that they called him "Brüder" too, classing him as one of themselves.

And then suddenly he had a flash of keener perception, and realised with a creeping of his flesh that he had all along misinterpreted—grossly misinterpreted all they had been saying. They had talked about the beauty of the place, its isolation and remoteness from the world, its peculiar fitness for certain kinds of spiritual development and worship—yet hardly, he now grasped, in the sense in which he had taken the words. They had meant something different. Their spiritual powers, their desire for loneliness, their passion for worship, were not the powers, the

solitude, or the worship that *he* meant and understood. He was playing the part in some horrible masquerade; he was among men who cloaked their lives with religion in order to follow their real purposes unseen of men.

What did it all mean? How had he blundered into so equivocal a situation? Had he blundered into it at all? Had he not rather been led into it, deliberately led? His thoughts grew dreadfully confused, and his confidence in himself began to fade. And why, he suddenly thought again, were they so impressed by the mere fact of his coming to revisit his old school? What was it they so admired and wondered at in his simple act? Why did they set such store upon his having the courage to come, to "give himself so freely," "unconditionally" as one of them had expressed it with such a mockery of exaggeration?

Fear stirred in his heart most horribly, and he found no answer to any of his questionings. Only one thing he now understood quite clearly: it was their purpose to keep him here. They did not intend that he should go. And from this moment he realised that they were sinister, formidable and, in some way he had yet to discover, inimical to himself, inimical to his life. And the phrase one of them had used a moment ago—"this *last* visit of his"—rose before his eyes in letters of flame.

Harris was not a man of action, and had never known in all the course of his career what it meant to be in a situation of real danger. He was not necessarily a coward, though, perhaps, a man of untried nerve. He realised at last plainly that he was in a very awkward predicament indeed, and that he had to deal with men who were utterly in earnest. What their intentions were he only vaguely guessed. His mind, indeed, was too confused for definite ratiocination, and he was only able to follow blindly the strongest instincts that moved in him. It never occurred to him that the Brothers might all be mad, or that he himself might have temporarily lost his senses and be suffering under some terrible delusion. In fact, nothing occurred to him—he realised nothing except that he meant to escape—and the quicker the better. A tremendous revulsion of feeling set in and overpowered him.

Accordingly, without further protest for the moment, he ate his pumpernickel and drank his coffee, talking meanwhile as naturally and pleasantly as he could, and when a suitable interval had passed, he rose to his feet and announced once more that he must now take his leave. He spoke very quietly, but

very decidedly. No one hearing him could doubt that he meant what he said. He had got very close to the door by this time.

"I regret," he said, using his best German, and speaking to a hushed room, "that our pleasant evening must come to an end, but it is now time for me to wish you all good-night." And then, as no one said anything, he added, though with a trifle less assurance, "And I thank you all most sincerely for your hospitality."

"On the contrary," replied Kalkmann instantly, rising from his chair and ignoring the hand the Englishman had stretched out to him, "it is we who have to thank you; and we do so most gratefully and sincerely."

And at the same moment at least half a dozen of the Brothers took up their position between himself and the door.

"You are very good to say so," Harris replied as firmly as he could manage, noticing this movement out of the corner of his eye, "but really I had no conception that—my little chance visit could have afforded you so much pleasure." He moved another step nearer the door, but Brüder Schliemann came across the room quickly and stood in front of him. His attitude was uncompromising. A dark and terrible expression had come into his face.

"But it was *not* by chance that you came, Brüder Harris," he said so that all the room could hear; "surely we have not misunderstood your presence here?" He raised his black eyebrows.

"No, no," the Englishman hastened to reply. "I was—I am delighted to be here. I told you what pleasure it gave me to find myself among you. Do not misunderstand me, I beg." His voice faltered a little, and he had difficulty in finding the words. More and more, too, he had difficulty in understanding *their* words.

"Of course," interposed Brüder Kalkmann in his iron bass, "*we* have not misunderstood. You have come back in the spirit of true and unselfish devotion. You offer yourself freely, and we all appreciate it. It is your willingness and nobility that have so completely won our veneration and respect." A faint murmur of applause ran around the room. "What we all delight in—what our great Master will especially delight in—is the value of your spontaneous and voluntary——"

He used a word Harris did not understand. He said *"Opfer."* The bewildered Englishman searched his brain for the translation, and searched in vain. For the life of him he could not remember what it meant. But the word, for all his inability to trans-

late it, touched his soul with ice. It was worse, far worse, than anything he had imagined. He felt like a lost, helpless creature, and all power to fight sank out of him from that moment.

"It is magnificent to be such a willing——" added Schliemann, sidling up to him with a dreadful leer on his face. He made use of the same word—*"Opfer."*

God! What could it all mean? "Offer himself!" "True spirit of devotion!" "Willing," "unselfish," "magnificent!" *Opfer, Opfer, Opfer!* What in the name of heaven did it mean, that strange, mysterious word that struck such terror into his heart?

He made a valiant effort to keep his presence of mind and hold his nerves steady. Turning, he saw that Kalkmann's face was a dead white. Kalkmann! He understood that well enough. *Kalkmann* meant "Man of Chalk"; he knew that. But what did *"Opfer"* mean? That was the real key to the situation. Words poured through his disordered mind in an endless stream—unusual, rare words he had perhaps heard but once in his life—while *"Opfer,"* a word in common use, entirely escaped him. What an extraordinary mockery it all was!

Then Kalkmann, pale as death, but his face hard as iron, spoke a few low words that he did not catch, and the Brothers standing by the walls at once turned the lamps down so that the room became dim. In the half light he could only just discern their faces and movements.

"It is time," he heard Kalkmann's remorseless voice continue just behind him. "The hour of midnight is at hand. Let us prepare. He comes! He comes; Brüder Asmodelius comes!" His voice rose to a chant.

And the sound of that name, for some extraordinary reason, was terrible—utterly terrible; so that Harris shook from head to foot as he heard it. Its utterance filled the air like soft thunder, and a hush came over the whole room. Forces rose all about him, transforming the normal into the horrible, and the spirit of craven fear ran through all his being, bringing him to the verge of collapse.

Asmodelius! Asmodelius! The name was appalling. For he understood at last to whom it referred and the meaning that lay between its great syllables. At the same instant, too, he suddenly understood the meaning of that unremembered word. The import of the word *"Opfer"* flashed upon his soul like a message of death.

He thought of making a wild effort to reach the door, but

the weakness of his trembling knees, and the row of black figures that stood between, dissuaded him at once. He would have screamed for help, but remembering the emptiness of the vast building, and the loneliness of the situation, he understood that no help could come that way, and he kept his lips closed. He stood still and did nothing. But he knew now what was coming.

Two of the Brothers approached and took him gently by the arm.

"Brüder Asmodelius accepts you," they whispered; "are you ready?"

Then he found his tongue and tried to speak. "But what have I to do with this Brüder Asm—Asmo——?" he stammered, a desperate rush of words crowding vainly behind the halting tongue.

The name refused to pass his lips. He could not pronounce it as they did. He could not pronounce it at all. His sense of helplessness then entered the acute stage, for this inability to speak the name produced a fresh sense of quite horrible confusion in his mind, and he became extraordinarily agitated.

"I came here for a friendly visit," he tried to say with a great effort, but, to his intense dismay, he heard his voice saying something quite different, and actually making use of that very word they had all used: "I came here as a willing *Opfer,*" he heard his own voice say, *"and I am quite ready."*

He was lost beyond all recall now! Not alone his mind, but the very muscles of his body had passed out of control. He felt that he was hovering on the confines of a phantom or demon-world—a world in which the name they had spoken constituted the Master-name, the word of ultimate power.

What followed he heard and saw as in a nightmare.

"In the half light that veils all truth, let us prepare to worship and adore," chanted Schliemann, who had preceded him to the end of the room.

"In the mists that protect our faces before the Black Throne, let us make ready the willing victim," echoed Kalkmann in his great bass.

They raised their faces, listening expectantly, as a roaring sound, like the passing of mighty projectiles, filled the air, far, far away, very wonderful, very forbidding. The walls of the room trembled.

"He comes! He comes! He comes!" chanted the Brothers in chorus.

The sound of roaring died away, and an atmosphere of still and utter cold established itself over all. Then Kalkmann, dark and unutterably stern, turned in the dim light and faced the rest.

"Asmodelius, our *Haupbrüder,* is about us," he cried in a voice that even while it shook was yet a voice of iron; "Asmodelius is about us. Make ready."

There followed a pause in which no one stirred or spoke. A tall Brother approached the Englishman; but Kalkmann held up his hand.

"Let the eyes remain uncovered," he said, "in honour of so freely giving himself." And to his horror Harris then realised for the first time that his hands were already fastened to his sides.

The Brother retreated again silently, and in the pause that followed all the figures about him dropped to their knees, leaving him standing alone, and as they dropped, in voices hushed with mingled reverence and awe, they cried softly, odiously, appallingly the name of the Being whom they momentarily expected to appear.

Then, at the end of the room, where the windows seemed to have disappeared so that he saw the stars, there rose into view far up against the night sky, grand and terrible, the outline of a man. A kind of grey glory enveloped it so that it resembled a steel-cased statue, immense, imposing, horrific in its distant splendour; while, at the same time, the face was so spiritually mighty, yet so proudly, so austerely sad, that Harris felt as he stared, that the sight was more than his eyes could meet, and that in another moment the power of vision would fail him altogether, and he must sink into utter nothingness.

So remote and inaccessible hung this figure that it was impossible to gauge anything as to its size, yet at the same time so strangely close, that when the grey radiance from its mightily broken visage, august and mournful, beat down upon his soul, pulsing like some dark star with the powers of spiritual evil, he felt almost as though he were looking into a face no farther removed from him in space than the face of any one of the Brothers who stood by his side.

And then the room filled and trembled with sounds that Harris understood full well were the failing voices of others who had preceded him in a long series down the years. There came first a plain, sharp cry, as of a man in the last anguish, choking for his breath, and yet, with the very final expiration of it, breathing the name of the Worship—of the dark Being who rejoiced to hear it.

The cries of the strangled; the short, running gasp of the suffocated; and the smothered gurgling of the tightened throat, all these, and more, echoed back and forth between the walls, the very walls in which he now stood a prisoner, a sacrificial victim. The cries, too, not alone of the broken bodies, but—far worse—of beaten, broken souls. And as the ghastly chorus rose and fell, there came also the faces of the lost and unhappy creatures to whom they belonged, and, against that curtain of pale grey light, he saw float past him in the air, an array of white and piteous human countenances that seemed to beckon and gibber at him as though he were already one of themselves.

Slowly, too, as the voices rose, and the pallid crew sailed past, that giant form of grey descended from the sky and approached the room that contained the worshippers and their prisoner. Hands rose and sank about him in the darkness, and he felt that he was being draped in other garments than his own; a circlet of ice seemed to run about his head, while round the waist, enclosing the fastened arms, he felt a girdle tightly drawn. At last, about his very throat, there ran a soft and silken touch which, better than if there had been full light, and a mirror held to his face, he understood to be the cord of sacrifice—and of death.

At this moment the Brothers, still prostrate upon the floor, began again their mournful, yet impassioned chanting, and as they did so a strange thing happened. For, apparently without moving or altering its position, the huge Figure seemed, at once and suddenly, to be inside the room, almost beside him, and to fill the space around him to the exclusion of all else.

He was now beyond all ordinary sensations of fear, only a drab feeling as of death—the death of the soul—stirred in his heart. His thoughts no longer even beat vainly for space. The end was near, and he knew it.

The dreadfully chanting voices rose about him in a wave: "We worship! We adore! We offer!" The sounds filled his ears and hammered, almost meaningless, upon his brain.

Then the majestic grey face turned slowly downwards upon him, and his very soul passed outwards and seemed to become absorbed in the sea of those anguished eyes. At the same moment a dozen hands forced him to his knees, and in the air before him he saw the arm of Kalkmann upraised, and felt the pressure about his throat grow strong.

It was in this awful moment, when he had given up all hope, and the help of gods or men seemed beyond question, that a

strange thing happened. For before his fading and terrified vision, there slid, as in a dream of light—yet without apparent rhyme or reason—wholly unbidden and unexplained—the face of that other man at the supper table of the railway inn. And the sight, even mentally, of that strong, wholesome, vigorous English face, inspired him suddenly with a new courage.

It was but a flash of fading vision before he sank into a dark and terrible death, yet, in some inexplicable way, the sight of that face stirred in him unconquerable hope and the certainty of deliverance. It was a face of power, a face, he now realised, of simple goodness such as might have been seen by men of old on the shores of Galilee; a face, by heaven, that could conquer even the devils of outer space.

And, in his despair and abandonment, he called upon it, and called with no uncertain accents. He found his voice in this overwhelming moment to some purpose; though the words he actually used, and whether they were in German or English, he could never remember. Their effect, nevertheless, was instantaneous. The Brothers understood, and that grey Figure of evil understood.

For a second the confusion was terrific. There came a great shattering sound. It seemed that the very earth trembled. But all Harris remembered afterwards was that voices rose about him in the clamour of terrified alarm——

"A man of power is among us! A man of God!"

The vast sound was repeated—the rushing through space as of huge projectiles—and he sank to the floor of the room, unconscious. The entire scene had vanished, vanished like smoke over the roof of a cottage when the wind blows.

And, by his side, sat down a slight un-German figure—the figure of the stranger at the inn—the man who had the "rather wonderful eyes."

When Harris came to himself he felt cold. He was lying under the open sky, and the cool air of field and forest was blowing upon his face. He sat up and looked about him. The memory of the late scene was still horribly in his mind, but no vestige of it remained. No walls or ceiling enclosed him; he was no longer in a room at all. There were no lamps turned low, no cigar smoke, no black forms of sinister worshippers, no tremendous grey Figure hovering beyond the windows.

Open space was about him, and he was lying on a pile of bricks

and mortar, his clothes soaked with dew, and the kind stars shining brightly overheard. He was lying, bruised, and shaken, among the heaped-up débris of a ruined building.

He stood up and stared about him. There, in the shadowy distance, lay the surrounding forest, and here, close at hand, stood the outline of the village buildings. But, underfoot, beyond question, lay nothing but the broken heaps of stones that betokened a building long since crumbled to dust. Then he saw that the stones were blackened, and that great wooden beams, half burnt, half rotten, made lines through the general débris. He stood, then, among the ruins of a burnt and shattered building, the weeds and nettles proving conclusively that it had lain thus for many years.

The moon had already set behind the encircling forest, but the stars that spangled the heavens threw enough light to enable him to make quite sure of what he saw. Harris, the silk merchant, stood among these broken and burnt stones and shivered.

Then he suddenly became aware that out of the gloom a figure had risen and stood beside him. Peering at him, he thought he recognised the face of the stranger at the railway inn.

"Are *you* real?" he asked in a voice he hardly recognised as his own.

"More than real—I'm friendly," replied the stranger; "I followed you up here from the inn."

Harris stood and stared for several minutes without adding anything. His teeth chattered. The least sound made him start; but the simple words in his own language, and the tone in which they were uttered, comforted him inconceivably.

"You're English too, thank God," he said inconsequently. "These German devils——" He broke off and put a hand to his eyes. "But what's become of them all—and the room—and—and——" The hand travelled down to his throat and moved nervously round his neck. He drew a long, long breath of relief. "Did I dream everything—everything?" he said distractedly.

He stared wildly about him, and the stranger moved forward and took his arm. "Come," he said soothingly, yet with a trace of command in the voice, "we will move away from here. The high-road, or even the woods will be more to your taste, for we are standing now on one of the most haunted—and most terribly haunted—spots of the whole world."

He guided his companion's stumbling footsteps over the broken masonry until they reached the path, the nettles stinging their

hands, and Harris feeling his way like a man in a dream. Passing through the twisted iron railing they reached the path, and thence made their way to the road, shining white in the night. Once safely out of the ruins, Harris collected himself and turned to look back.

"But, how is it possible?" he exclaimed, his voice still shaking. "How can it be possible? When I came in here I saw the building in the moonlight. They opened the door. I saw the figures and heard the voices and touched, yes touched their very hands, and saw their damned black faces, saw them far more plainly than I see you now." He was deeply bewildered. The glamour was still upon his eyes with a degree of reality stronger than the reality even of normal life. "Was I so utterly deluded?"

Then suddenly the words of the stranger, which he had only half heard or understood, returned to him.

"Haunted?" he asked, looking hard at him; "haunted, did you say?" He paused in the roadway and stared into the darkness where the building of the old school had first appeared to him. But the stranger hurried him forward.

"We shall talk more safely farther on," he said. "I followed you from the inn the moment I realised where you had gone. When I found you it was eleven o'clock——"

"Eleven o'clock," said Harris, remembering with a shudder.

"——I saw you drop. I watched over you till you recovered consciousness of your own accord, and now—now I am here to guide you safely back to the inn. I have broken the spell—the glamour——"

"I owe you a great deal, sir," interrupted Harris again, beginning to understand something of the stranger's kindness, "but I don't understand it all. I feel dazed and shaken." His teeth still chattered, and spells of violent shivering passed over him from head to foot. He found that he was clinging to the other's arm. In this way they passed beyond the deserted and crumbling village and gained the high-road that led homewards through the forest.

"That school building has long been in ruins," said the man at his side presently; "it was burnt down by order of the Elders of the community at least ten years ago. The village has been uninhabited ever since. But the simulacra of certain ghastly events that took place under that roof in past days still continue. And the 'shells' of the chief participants still enact there the dreadful

deeds that led to its final destruction, and to the desertion of the whole settlement. They were devil-worshippers!"

Harris listened with beads of perspiration on his forehead that did not come alone from their leisurely pace through the cool night. Although he had seen this man but once before in his life, and had never before exchanged so much as a word with him, he felt a degree of confidence and a subtle sense of safety and well-being in his presence that were the most healing influences he could possibly have wished after the experience he had been through. For all that, he still felt as if he were walking in a dream, and though he heard every word that fell from his companion's lips, it was only the next day that the full import of all he said became fully clear to him. The presence of this quiet stranger, the man with the wonderful eyes which he felt now, rather than saw, applied a soothing anodyne to his shattered spirit that healed him through and through. And this healing influence, distilled from the dark figure at his side, satisfied his first imperative need, so that he almost forgot to realise how strange and opportune it was that the man should be there at all.

It somehow never occurred to him to ask his name, or to feel any undue wonder that one passing tourist should take so much trouble on behalf of another. He just walked by his side, listening to his quiet words, and allowing himself to enjoy the very wonderful experience after his recent ordeal, of being helped, strengthened, blessed. Only once, remembering vaguely something of his reading of years ago, he turned to the man beside him, after some more than usually remarkable words, and heard himself, almost involuntarily it seemed, putting the question: "Then are you a Rosicrucian, sir, perhaps?" But the stranger had ignored the words, or possibly not heard them, for he continued with his talk as though unconscious of any interruption, and Harris became aware that another somewhat unusual picture had taken possession of his mind, as they walked there side by side through the cool reaches of the forest, and that he had found his imagination suddenly charged with the childhood memory of Jacob wrestling with an angel—wrestling all night with a being of superior quality whose strength eventually became his own.

"It was your abrupt conversation with the priest at supper that first put me upon the track of this remarkable occurrence," he heard the man's quiet voice beside him in the darkness, "and it was from him I learned after you left the story of the devil-

worship that became secretly established in the heart of this simple and devout little community."

"Devil-worship! Here——!" Harris stammered, aghast.

"Yes—here—conducted secretly for years by a group of Brothers before unexplained disappearances in the neighbourhood led to its discovery. For where could they have found a safer place in the whole wide world for their ghastly traffic and perverted powers than here, in the very precincts—under cover of the very shadow of saintliness and holy living?"

"Awful, awful!" whispered the silk merchant, "and when I tell you the words they used to me——"

"I know it all," the stranger said quietly. "I saw and heard everything. My plan first was to wait till the end and then to take steps for their destruction, but in the interest of your personal safety"—he spoke with the utmost gravity and conviction—"in the interest of the safety of your soul, I made my presence known when I did, and before the conclusion had been reached——"

"My safety! The danger, then, was real. They were alive and——" Words failed him. He stopped in the road and turned towards his companion, the shining of whose eyes he could just make out in the gloom.

"It was a concourse of the shells of violent men, spiritually-developed but evil men, seeking after death—the death of the body—to prolong their vile and unnatural existence. And had they accomplished their object, you, in turn, at the death of your body, would have passed into their power and helped to swell their dreadful purposes."

Harris made no reply. He was trying hard to concentrate his mind upon the sweet and common things of life. He even thought of silk and St. Paul's Churchyard and the faces of his partners in business.

"For you came all prepared to be caught," he heard the other's voice like some one talking to him from a distance; "your deeply introspective mood had already reconstructed the past so vividly, so intensely, that you were *en rapport* at once with any forces of those days that chanced still to be lingering. And they swept you up all unresistingly."

Harris tightened his hold upon the stranger's arm as he heard. At the moment he had room for one emotion only. It did not seem to him odd that this stranger should have such intimate knowledge of his mind.

"It is, alas, chiefly the evil emotions that are able to leave their photographs upon surrounding scenes and objects," the other added, "and who ever heard of a place haunted by a noble deed, or of beautiful and lovely ghosts revisiting the glimpses of the moon? It is unfortunate. But the wicked passions of men's hearts alone seem strong enough to leave pictures that persist; the good are ever too luke-warm."

The stranger sighed as he spoke. But Harris, exhausted and shaken as he was to the very core, paced by his side, only half listening. He moved as in a dream still. It was very wonderful to him, this walk home under the stars in the early hours of the October morning, the peaceful forest all about them, mist rising here and there over the small clearings, and the sound of water from a hundred little invisible streams filling in the pauses of the talk. In after life he always looked back to it as something magical and impossible, something that had seemed too beautiful, too curiously beautiful, to have been quite true. And, though at the time he heard and understood but a quarter of what the stranger said, it came back to him afterwards, staying with him till the end of his days, and always with a curious, haunting sense of unreality, as though he had enjoyed a wonderful dream of which he could recall only faint and exquisite portions.

But the horror of the earlier experience was effectually dispelled; and when they reached the railway inn, somewhere about three o'clock in the morning, Harris shook the stranger's hand gratefully, effusively, meeting the look of those rather wonderful eyes with a full heart, and went up to his room, thinking in a hazy, dream-like way of the words with which the stranger had brought their conversation to an end as they left the confines of the forest.

"And if thought and emotion can persist in this way so long after the brain that sent them forth has crumbled into dust, how vitally important it must be to control their very birth in the heart, and guard them with the keenest possible restraint."

But Harris, the silk merchant, slept better than might have been expected, and with a soundness that carried him half-way through the day. And when he came downstairs and learned that the stranger had already taken his departure, he realised with keen regret that he had never once thought of asking his name.

"Yes, he signed in the visitors' book," said the girl in reply to his question.

And he turned over the blotted pages and found there, the last entry, in a very delicate and individual handwriting—

"*John Silence,* London."

Mrs. E. Bland

NO. 17

I yawned. I could not help it. But the flat, inexorable voice went on.

"Speaking from the journalistic point of view—I may tell you, gentlemen, that I once occupied the position of advertisement editor to the *Bradford Woollen Goods Journal*—and speaking from that point of view, I hold the opinion that all the best ghost stories have been written over and over again; and if I were to leave the road and return to a literary career I should never be led away by ghosts. Realism's what's wanted nowadays, if you want to be up-to-date."

The large commercial paused for breath.

"You never can tell with the public," said the lean, elderly traveller; "it's like in the fancy business. You never know how it's going to be. Whether it's a clockwork ostrich or Sometite silk or a particular shape of shaded glass novelty or a tobacco-box got up to look like a raw chop, you never know your luck."

"That depends on who you are," said the dapper man in the corner by the fire. "If you've got the right push about you, you can make a thing go, whether it's a clockwork kitten or imitation meat, and with stories, I take it, it's just the same—realism or ghost stories. But the best ghost story would be the realest one, *I* think."

The large commercial had got his breath.

"I don't believe in ghost stories, myself," he was saying with earnest dullness; "but there was rather a queer thing happened to a second cousin of an aunt of mine by marriage—a very sensible woman with no nonsense about her. And the soul of truth and honour. I shouldn't have believed it if she had been one of your flighty, fanciful sort."

"Don't tell us the story," said the melancholy man who travelled in hardware; "you'll make us afraid to go to bed."

The well-meant effort failed. The large commercial went on, as I had known he would; his words overflowed his mouth, as his person overflowed his chair. I turned my mind to my own affairs, coming back to the commercial room in time to hear the summing up.

"The doors were all locked, and she was quite certain she saw a tall, white figure glide past her and vanish. I wouldn't have believed it if——" And so on *da capo,* from "if she hadn't been the second cousin" to the "soul of truth and honour."

I yawned again.

"Very good story," said the smart little man by the fire. He was a traveller, as the rest of us were; his presence in the room told us that much. He had been rather silent during dinner, and afterwards, while the red curtains were being drawn and the red and black cloth laid between the glasses and the dacanters and the mahogany, he had quietly taken the best chair in the warmest corner. We had got our letters written and the large traveller had been boring for some time before I even noticed that there was a best chair and that this silent, bright-eyed, dapper, fair man had secured it.

"Very good story," he said; "but it's not what I call realism. You don't tell us half enough, sir. You don't say when it happened or where, or the time of year, or what colour your aunt's second cousin's hair was. Nor yet you don't tell us what it was she saw, nor what the room was like where she saw it, nor why she saw it, nor what happened afterwards. And I shouldn't like to breathe a word against anybody's aunt by marriage's cousin, first or second, but I must say I like a story about what a man's seen *himself.*"

"So do I," the large commercial snorted, "when I hear it."

He blew his nose like a trumpet of defiance.

"But," said the rabbit-faced man, "we know nowadays, what with the advance of science and all that sort of thing, we know there aren't any such things as ghosts. They're hallucinations; that's what they are—hallucinations."

"Don't seem to matter what you call them," the dapper one urged. "If you see a thing that looks as real as you do yourself, a thing that makes your blood run cold and turns you sick and silly with fear—well, call it ghost, or call it hallucination, or call it Tommy Dodd; it isn't the *name* that matters."

The elderly commercial coughed and said, "You might call it another name. You might call it——"

"No, you mightn't," said the little man, briskly; "not when the man it happened to had been a teetotal Bond of Joy for five years and is to this day."

"Why don't you tell us the story?" I asked.

"I might be willing," he said, "if the rest of the company were agreeable. Only I warn you it's not that sort-of-a-kind-of-a-somebody-fancied-they-saw-a-sort-of-a-kind-of-a-something-sort of a story. No, sir. Everything I'm going to tell you is plain and straightforward and as clear as a time-table—clearer than some. But I don't much like telling it, especially to people who don't believe in ghosts."

Several of us said we did believe in ghosts. The heavy man snorted and looked at his watch. And the man in the best chair began.

"Turn the gas down a bit, will you? Thanks. Did any of you know Herbert Hatteras? He was on this road a good many years. No? Well, never mind. He was a good chap, I believe, with good teeth and a black whisker. But I didn't know him myself. He was before my time. Well, this that I'm going to tell you about happened at a certain commercial hotel. I'm not going to give it a name, because that sort of thing gets about, and, in every other respect it's a good house and reasonable, and we all have our living to get. It was just a good ordinary old-fashioned commercial hotel, as it might be this. And I've often used it since, though they've never put me in that room again. Perhaps they shut it up after what happened.

"Well, the beginning of it was, I came across an old schoolfellow; in Boulter's Lock one Sunday it was, I remember. Jones was his name, Ted Jones. We both had canoes. We had tea at Marlow, and we got talking about this and that and old times and old mates; and do you remember Jim, and what's become of Tom, and so on. Oh, you know. And I happened to ask after his brother, Fred by name. And Ted turned pale and almost dropped his cup, and he said, 'You don't mean to say you haven't heard?' 'No,' says I, mopping up the tea he'd slopped over with my handkerchief. 'No; what?' I said.

"'It was horrible,' he said. 'They wired for me, and I saw him afterwards. Whether he'd done it himself or not, nobody knows; but they'd found him lying on the floor with his throat cut.' No cause could be assigned for the rash act, Ted told me.

I asked him where it had happened, and he told me the name of this hotel—I'm not going to name it. And when I'd sympathised with him and drawn him out about old times and poor old Fred being such a good old sort and all that, I asked him what the room was like. I always like to know what the places look like where things happen.

"No, there wasn't anything specially rum about the room, only that it had a French bed with red curtains in a sort of alcove; and a large mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse, with a glass door; and, instead of a swing-glass, a carved, black-framed glass screwed up against the wall between the windows, and a picture of 'Belshazzar's Feast' over the mantelpiece. I beg your pardon?" He stopped, for the heavy commercial had opened his mouth and shut it again.

"I thought you were going to say something," the dapper man went on. "Well, we talked about other things and parted, and I thought no more about it till business brought me to—but I'd better not name the town either—and I found my firm had marked this very hotel—where poor Fred had met his death, you know—for me to put up at. And I had to put up there too, because of their addressing everything to me there. And, anyhow, I expect I should have gone there out of curiosity.

"No. I didn't believe in ghosts in those days. I was like you, sir." He nodded amiably to the large commercial.

"The house was very full, and we were quite a large party in the room—very pleasant company, as it might be to-night; and we got talking of ghosts—just as it might be us. And there was a chap in glasses, sitting just over there, I remember—an old man on the road, he was; and he said, just as it might be any of you, 'I don't believe in ghosts, but I wouldn't care to sleep in Number Seventeen, for all that'; and, of course, we asked him why. 'Because,' said he, very short, 'that's why.'

"But when we'd persuaded him a bit, he told us.

"'Because that's the room where chaps cut their throats,' he said. 'There was a chap called Bert Hatteras began it. They found him weltering in his gore. And since that every man that's slept there's been found with his throat cut.'

"I asked him how many had slept there. 'Well, only two beside the first,' he said; 'they shut it up then.' 'Oh, did they?' said I. 'Well, they've opened it again. Number Seventeen's my room!'

"I tell you those chaps looked at me.

"'But you aren't going to *sleep* in it?' one of them said. And I explained that I didn't pay half a dollar for a bedroom to keep awake in.

"'I suppose it's press of business has made them open it up again,' the chap in spectacles said. 'It's a very mysterious affair. There's some secret horror about that room that we don't understand,' he said, 'and I'll tell you another queer thing. Every one of those poor chaps was a commercial gentleman. That's what I don't like about it. There was Bert Hatteras—he was the first, and a chap called Jones—Frederick Jones, and then Donald Overshaw—a Scotchman he was, and travelled in child's underclothing.'

"Well, we sat there and talked a bit, and if I hadn't been a Bond of Joy, I don't know that I mightn't have exceeded, gentlemen—yes, positively exceeded; for the more I thought about it the less I liked the thought of Number Seventeen. I hadn't noticed the room particularly, except to see that the furniture had been changed since poor Fred's time. So I just slipped out, by and by, and I went out to the little glass case under the arch where the booking-clerk sits—just like here, that hotel was—and I said:—

"'Look here, miss; haven't you another room empty except seventeen?'

"'No,' she said; 'I don't think so.'

"'Then what's that?' I said, and pointed to a key hanging on the board, the only one left.

"'Oh,' she said, 'that's sixteen.'

"'Anyone in sixteen?' I said. 'Is it a comfortable room?'

"'No,' said she. 'Yes; quite comfortable. It's next door to yours —much the same class of room.'

"'Then I'll have sixteen, if you've no objection,' I said, and went back to the others, feeling very clever.

"When I went up to bed I locked my door, and, though I didn't believe in ghosts, I wished seventeen wasn't next door to me, and I wished there wasn't a door between the two rooms, though the door was locked right enough and the key on my side. I'd only got the one candle besides the two on the dressing table, which I hadn't lighted; and I got my collar and tie off before I noticed that the furniture in my new room was the furniture out of Number Seventeen; French bed with red curtains, mahogany wardrobe as big as a hearse, and the carved mirror over the dressing-table between the two windows, and 'Belshazzar's

Feast' over the mantelpiece. So that, though I'd not got the *room* where the commercial gentlemen had cut their throats, I'd got the *furniture* out of it. And for a moment I thought that was worse than the other. When I thought of what that furniture could tell, if it could speak——

"It was a silly thing to do—but we're all friends here and I don't mind owning up—I looked under the bed and I looked inside the hearse-wardrobe and I looked in a sort of narrow cupboard there was, where a body could have stood upright——"

"A body?" I repeated.

"A man, I mean. You see, it seemed to me that either these poor chaps had been murdered by someone who hid himself in Number Seventeen to do it, or else there was something there that frightened them into cutting their throats; and upon my soul, I can't tell you which idea I liked least!"

He paused, and filled his pipe very deliberately. "Go on," someone said. And he went on.

"Now, you'll observe," he said, "that all I've told you up to the time of my going to bed that night's just hearsay. So I don't ask you to believe it—though the three coroners' inquests would be enough to stagger most chaps, I should say. Still, what I'm going to tell you now's *my* part of the story—what happened to me myself in that room."

He paused again, holding the pipe in his hand, unlighted.

There was a silence, which I broke.

"Well, what *did* happen?" I asked.

"I had a bit of a struggle with myself," he said. "I reminded myself it was not that room, but the next one that it had happened in. I smoked a pipe or two and read the morning paper, advertisements and all. And at last I went to bed. I left the candle burning, though, I own that."

"Did you sleep?" I asked.

"Yes. I slept. Sound as a top. I was awakened by a soft tapping on my door. I sat up. I don't think I've ever been so frightened in my life. But I made myself say, 'Who's there?' in a whisper. Heaven knows I never expected anyone to answer. The candle had gone out and it was pitch-dark. There was a quiet murmur and a shuffling sound outside. And no one answered. I tell you I hadn't expected anyone to. But I cleared my throat and cried out, 'Who's there?' in a real out-loud voice. And 'Me, sir,' said a voice. 'Shaving-water, sir; six o'clock, sir.'

"It was the chambermaid."

A movement of relief ran round our circle.

"I don't think much of your story," said the large commercial.

"You haven't heard it yet," said the story-teller, dryly. "It was six o'clock on a winter's morning, and pitch-dark. My train went at seven. I got up and began to dress. My one candle wasn't much use. I lighted the two on the dressing table to see to shave by. There wasn't any shaving-water outside my door, after all. And the passage was as black as a coal-hole. So I started to shave with cold water; one has to sometimes, you know. I'd gone over my face and I was just going lightly round under my chin, when I saw something move in the looking-glass. I mean something that moved was reflected in the looking-glass. The big door of the wardrobe had swung open, and by a sort of double reflection I could see the French bed with the red curtains. On the edge of it sat a man in his shirt and trousers—a man with black hair and whiskers, with the most awful look of despair and fear on his face that I've ever seen or dreamt of. I stood paralysed, watching him in the mirror. I could not have turned round to save my life. Suddenly he laughed. It was a horrid, silent laugh, and showed all his teeth. They were very white and even. And the next moment he had cut his throat from ear to ear, there before my eyes. Did you ever see a man cut his throat? The bed was all white before."

The story-teller had laid down his pipe, and he passed his hand over his face before he went on.

"When I could look round I did. There was no one in the room. The bed was as white as ever. Well, that's all," he said, abruptly, "except that now, of course, I understood how these poor chaps had come by their deaths. They'd all seen this horror—the ghost of the first poor chap, I suppose—Bert Hatteras, you know; and with the shock their hands must have slipped and their throats got cut before they could stop themselves. Oh! by the way, when I looked at my watch it was two o'clock; there hadn't been any chambermaid at all. I must have dreamed that. But I didn't dream the other. Oh! and one thing more. It was the same room. They hadn't changed the room, they'd only changed the number. *It was the same room!*"

"Look here," said the heavy man; "the room you've been talking about. *My* room's sixteen. And it's got that same furniture in it as what you describe, and the same picture and all."

"Oh, has it?" said the story-teller, a little uncomfortable, it seemed. "I'm sorry. But the cat's out of the bag now, and it can't be helped. Yes, it *was* this house I was speaking of. I suppose

they've opened the room again. But you don't believe in ghosts; *you'll* be all right."

"Yes," said the heavy man, and presently got up and left the room.

"He's gone to see if he can get his room changed. You see if he hasn't," said the rabbit-faced man; "and I don't wonder."

The heavy man came back and settled into his chair.

"I could do with a drink," he said, reaching to the bell.

"I'll stand some punch, gentlemen, if you'll allow me," said our dapper story-teller. "I rather pride myself on my punch. I'll step out to the bar and get what I need for it."

"I thought he said he was a teetotaller," said the heavy traveller when he had gone. And then our voices buzzed like a hive of bees. When our story-teller came in again we turned on him—half-a-dozen of us at once—and spoke.

"One at a time," he said, gently. "I didn't quite catch what you said."

"We want to know," I said, "how it was—if seeing that ghost made all those chaps cut their throats by startling them when they were shaving—how was it *you* didn't cut *your* throat when you saw it?"

"I should have," he answered, gravely, "without the slightest doubt—I should have cut my throat, only," he glanced at our heavy friend, "I always shave with a safety razor. I travel in them," he added, slowly, and bisected a lemon.

"But—but," said the large man, when he could speak through our uproar, "I've gone and given up my room."

"Yes," said the dapper man, squeezing the lemon; "I've just had my things moved into it. It's the best room in the house. I always think it worth while to take a little pains to secure it."

A. M. Burrage

THE WAXWORK

Reprinted from *Someone in the Room,* by Ex-Private X, by special permission of the author.

While the uniformed attendants of Marriner's Waxworks were ushering the last stragglers through the great glass-panelled

double doors, the manager sat in his office interviewing Raymond Hewson.

The manager was a youngish man, stout, blond and of medium height. He wore his clothes well and contrived to look extremely smart without appearing over-dressed. Raymond Hewson looked neither. His clothes, which had been good when new and which were still carefully brushed and pressed, were beginning to show signs of their owner's losing battle with the world. He was a small, spare, pale man, with lank, errant brown hair, and although he spoke plausibly and even forcibly he had the defensive and somewhat furtive air of a man who was used to rebuffs. He looked what he was, a man gifted somewhat above the ordinary, who was a failure through his lack of self-assertion.

The manager was speaking.

"There is nothing new in your request," he said. "In fact we refuse it to different people—mostly young bloods who have tried to make bets—about three times a week. We have nothing to gain and something to lose by letting people spend the night in our Murderers' Den. If I allowed it, and some young idiot lost his senses, what would be my position? But your being a journalist somewhat alters the case."

Hewson smiled.

"I suppose you mean that journalists have no senses to lose."

"No, no," laughed the manager, "but one imagines them to be responsible people. Besides, here we have something to gain; publicity and advertisement."

"Exactly," said Hewson, "and there I thought we might come to terms."

The manager laughed again.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I know what's coming. You want to be paid twice, do you? It used to be said years ago that Madame Tussaud's would give a man a hundred pounds for sleeping alone in the Chamber of Horrors. I hope you don't think that we have made any such offer. Er—what is your paper, Mr. Hewson?"

"I am freelancing at present," Hewson confessed, "working on space for several papers. However, I should find no difficulty in getting the story printed. The *Morning Echo* would use it like a shot. 'A Night with Marriner's Murderers.' No live paper could turn it down."

The manager rubbed his chin.

"Ah! And how do you propose to treat it?"

"I shall make it gruesome, of course; gruesome with just a saving touch of humour."

The other nodded and offered Hewson his cigarette-case.

"Very well, Mr. Hewson," he said. "Get your story printed in the *Morning Echo,* and there will be a five-pound note waiting for you here when you care to come and call for it. But first of all, it's no small ordeal that you're proposing to undertake. I'd like to be quite sure about you, and I'd like you to be quite sure about yourself. I own I shouldn't care to take it on. I've seen those figures dressed and undressed, I know all about the process of their manufacture, I can walk about in company downstairs as unmoved as if I were walking among so many skittles, but I should hate having to sleep down there alone among them."

"Why?" asked Hewson.

"I don't know. There isn't any reason. I don't believe in ghosts. If I did I should expect them to haunt the scene of their crimes or the spot where their bodies were laid, instead of a cellar which happens to contain their waxwork effigies. It's just that I couldn't sit alone among them all night, with their seeming to stare at me in the way they do. After all, they represent the lowest and most appalling types of humanity, and—although I would not own it publicly—the people who come to see them are not generally charged with the very highest motives. The whole atmosphere of the place is unpleasant, and if you are susceptible to atmosphere I warn you that you are in for a very uncomfortable night."

Hewson had known that from the moment when the idea had first occurred to him. His soul sickened at the prospect, even while he smiled casually upon the manager. But he had a wife and family to keep, and for the past month he had been living on paragraphs, eked out by his rapidly dwindling store of savings. Here was a chance not to be missed—the price of a special story in the *Morning Echo,* with a five-pound note to add to it. It meant comparative wealth and luxury for a week, and freedom from the worst anxieties for a fortnight. Besides, if he wrote the story well, it might lead to an offer of regular employment.

"The way of transgressors—and newspaper men—is hard," he said. "I have already promised myself an uncomfortable night because your murderers' den is obviously not fitted up as an hotel bedroom. But I don't think your waxworks will worry me much."

"You're not superstitious?"

"Not a bit," Hewson laughed.

"But you're a journalist; you must have a strong imagination."

"The news editors for whom I've worked have always complained that I haven't any. Plain facts are not considered sufficient in our trade, and the papers don't like offering their readers unbuttered bread."

The manager smiled and rose.

"Right," he said. "I think the last of the people have gone. Wait a moment. I'll give orders for the figures downstairs not to be draped, and let the night people know that you'll be here. Then I'll take you down and show you round."

He picked up the receiver of a house telephone, spoke into it and presently replaced it.

"One condition I'm afraid I must impose on you," he remarked. "I must ask you not to smoke. We had a fire scare down in the Murderers' Den this evening. I don't know who gave the alarm, but whoever it was it was a false one. Fortunately there were very few people down there at the time, or there might have been a panic. And now, if you're ready, we'll make a move."

Hewson followed the manager through half a dozen rooms where attendants were busy shrouding the kings and queens of England, the generals and prominent statesmen of this and other generations, all the mixed herd of humanity whose fame or notoriety had rendered them eligible for this kind of immortality. The manager stopped once and spoke to a man in uniform, saying something about an arm-chair in the Murderers' Den.

"It's the best we can do for you, I'm afraid," he said to Hewson. "I hope you'll be able to get some sleep."

He led the way through an open barrier and down ill-lit stone stairs which conveyed a sinister impression of giving access to a dungeon. In a passage at the bottom were a few preliminary horrors, such as relics of the Inquisition, a rack taken from a mediæval castle, branding irons, thumbscrews, and other mementoes of man's one-time cruelty to man. Beyond the passage was the Murderers' Den.

It was a room of irregular shape with a vaulted roof, and dimly lit by electric lights burning behind inverted bowls of frosted glass. It was, by design, an eerie and uncomfortable chamber—a chamber whose atmosphere invited its visitors to speak in whispers. There was something of the air of a chapel about it,

but a chapel no longer devoted to the practice of piety and given over now for base and impious worship.

The waxwork murderers stood on low pedestals with numbered tickets at their feet. Seeing them elsewhere, and without knowing whom they represented, one would have thought them a dull-looking crew, chiefly remarkable for the shabbiness of their clothes, and as evidence of the changes of fashion even among the unfashionable.

Recent notorieties rubbed dusty shoulders with the old "favourites." Thurtell, the murderer of Weir, stood as if frozen in the act of making a shop-window gesture to young Bywaters. There was Lefroy the poor half-baked little snob who killed for gain so that he might ape the gentleman. Within five yards of him sat Mrs. Thompson, that erotic romanticist, hanged to propitiate British middle-class matronhood. Charles Peace, the only member of that vile company who looked uncompromisingly and entirely evil, sneered across a gangway at Norman Thorne. Browne and Kennedy, the two most recent additions, stood between Mrs. Dyer and Patrick Mahon.

The manager, walking around with Hewson, pointed out several of the more interesting of these unholy notabilities.

"That's Crippen; I expect you recognize him. Insignificant little beast who looks as if he couldn't tread on a worm. That's Armstrong. Looks like a decent, harmless country gentleman, doesn't he? There's old Vaquier; you can't miss him because of his beard. And of course this——"

"Who's that?" Hewson interrupted in a whisper, pointing.

"Oh, I was coming to him," said the manager in a light undertone. "Come and have a good look at him. This is our star turn. He's the only one of the bunch that hasn't been hanged."

The figure which Hewson had indicated was that of a small, slight man not much more than five feet in height. It wore little waxed moustaches, large spectacles, and a caped coat. There was something so exaggeratedly French in its appearance that it reminded Hewson of a stage caricature. He could not have said precisely why the mild-looking face seemed to him so repellent, but he had already recoiled a step and, even in the manager's company, it cost him an effort to look again.

"But who is he?" he asked.

"That," said the manager, "is Dr. Bourdette."

Hewson shook his head doubtfully.

"I think I've heard the name," he said, "but I forget in connection with what."

The manager smiled.

"You'd remember better if you were a Frenchman," he said. "For some long while that man was the terror of Paris. He carried on his work of healing by day, and of throat-cutting by night, when the fit was on him. He killed for the sheer devilish pleasure it gave him to kill, and always in the same way—with a razor. After his last crime he left a clue behind him which set the police upon his track. One clue led to another, and before very long they knew that they were on the track of the Parisian equivalent of our Jack the Ripper, and had enough evidence to send him to the madhouse or the guillotine on a dozen capital charges.

"But even then our friend here was too clever for them. When he realised that the toils were closing about him he mysteriously disappeared, and ever since the police of every civilised country have been looking for him. There is no doubt that he managed to make away with himself, and by some means which has prevented his body coming to light. One or two crimes of a similar nature have taken place since his disappearance, but he is believed almost for certain to be dead, and the experts believe these recrudescences to be the work of an imitator. It's queer, isn't it, how every notorious murderer has imitators?"

Hewson shuddered and fidgeted with his feet.

"I don't like him at all," he confessed. "Ugh! What eyes he's got!"

"Yes, this figure's a little masterpiece. You find the eyes bite into you? Well, that's excellent realism, then, for Bourdette practised mesmerism, and was supposed to mesmerise his victims before dispatching them. Indeed, had he not done so, it is impossible to see how so small a man could have done his ghastly work. There were never any signs of a struggle."

"I thought I saw him move," said Hewson with a catch in his voice.

The manager smiled.

"You'll have more than one optical illusion before the night's out, I expect. You shan't be locked in. You can come upstairs when you've had enough of it. There are watchmen on the premises, so you'll find company. Don't be alarmed if you hear them moving about. I'm sorry I can't give you any more light, because all the lights are on. For obvious reasons we keep this place as

gloomy as possible. And now I think you had better return with me to the office and have a tot of whisky before beginning your night's vigil."

. . . . . .

The member of the night staff who placed the arm-chair for Hewson was inclined to be facetious.

"Where will you have it, sir?" he asked, grinning. "Just 'ere, so as you can 'ave a little talk with Crippen when you're tired of sitting still? Or there's old Mother Dyer over there, making eyes and looking as if she could do with a bit of company. Say where, sir."

Hewson smiled. The man's chaff pleased him if only because, for the moment at least, it lent the proceedings a much-desired air of the commonplace.

"I'll place it myself, thanks," he said. "I'll find out where the draughts come from first."

"You won't find any down here. Well, good night, sir. I'm upstairs if you want me. Don't let 'em sneak up be'ind you and touch your neck with their cold and clammy 'ands. And you look out for that old Mrs. Dyer; I b'lieve she's taken a fancy to you."

Hewson laughed and wished the man good night. It was easier than he had expected. He wheeled the arm-chair—a heavy one upholstered in plush—a little way down the central gangway, and deliberately turned it so that its back was towards the effigy of Dr. Bourdette. For some undefined reason he liked Dr. Bourdette a great deal less than his companions. Busying himself with arranging the chair he was almost light-hearted, but when the attendant's footfalls had died away and a deep hush stole over the chamber he realised that he had no slight ordeal before him.

The dim unwavering light fell on the rows of figures which were so uncannily like human beings that the silence and the stillness seemed unnatural and even ghastly. He missed the sound of breathing, the rustling of clothes, the hundred and one minute noises one hears when even the deepest silence has fallen upon a crowd. But the air was as stagnant as water at the bottom of a standing pond. There was not a breath in the chamber to stir a curtain or rustle a hanging drapery or start a shadow. His own shadow, moving in response to a shifted arm or leg, was all that could be coaxed into motion. All was still to the gaze and silent

to the ear. "It must be like this at the bottom of the sea," he thought, and wondered how to work the phrase into his story on the morrow.

He faced the sinister figures boldly enough. They were only waxworks. So long as he let that thought dominate all others he promised himself that all would be well. It did not, however, save him long from the discomfort occasioned by the waxen stare of Dr. Bourdette, which, he knew, was directed upon him from behind. The eyes of the little Frenchman's effigy haunted and tormented him, and he itched with the desire to turn and look.

"Come!" he thought, "my nerves have started already. If I turn and look at that dressed-up dummy it will be an admission of funk."

And then another voice in his brain spoke to him.

"It's because you're afraid that you won't turn and look at him."

The two Voices quarrelled silently for a moment or two, and at last Hewson slewed his chair round a little and looked behind him.

Among the many figures standing in stiff, unnatural poses, the effigy of the dreadful little doctor stood out with a queer prominence, perhaps because a steady beam of light beat straight down upon it. Hewson flinched before the parody of mildness which some fiendishly skilled craftsman had managed to convey in wax, met the eyes for one agonised second, and turned again to face the other direction.

"He's only a waxwork like the rest of you," Hewson muttered defiantly. "You're all only waxworks."

They were only waxworks, yes, but waxworks don't move. Not that he had seen the least movement anywhere, but it struck him that, in the moment or two while he had looked behind him, there had been the least subtle change in the grouping of the figures in front. Crippen, for instance, seemed to have turned at least one degree to the left. Or, thought Hewson, perhaps the illusion was due to the fact that he had not slewed his chair back into its exact original position. And there were Field and Grey, too; surely one of them had moved his hands. Hewson held his breath for a moment, and then drew his courage back to him as a man lifts a weight. He remembered the words of more than one news editor and laughed savagely to himself.

"And they tell me I've got no imagination!" he said beneath his breath.

He took a notebook from his pocket and wrote quickly.

"Mem.—Deathly silence and unearthly stillness of figures. Like being bottom of sea. Hypnotic eyes of Dr. Bourdette. Figures seem to move when not being watched."

He closed the book suddenly over his fingers and looked round quickly and awfully over his right shoulder. He had neither seen nor heard a movement, but it was as if some sixth sense had made him aware of one. He looked straight into the vapid countenance of Lefroy which smiled vacantly back as if to say, "It wasn't I!"

Of course it wasn't he, or any of them; it was his own nerves. Or was it? Hadn't Crippen moved again during that moment when his attention was directed elsewhere. You couldn't trust that little man! Once you took your eyes off him he took advantage of it to shift his position. That was what they were all doing, if he only knew it, he told himself; and half rose out of his chair. This was not quite good enough! He was going. He wasn't going to spend the night with a lot of waxworks which moved while he wasn't looking.

. . . Hewson sat down again. This was very cowardly and very absurd. They *were* only waxworks and they *couldn't* move; let him hold that thought and all would yet be well. Then why all that silent unrest about him?—a subtle something in the air which did not quite break the silence and happened, whichever way he looked, just beyond the boundaries of his vision.

He swung round quickly to encounter the mild but baleful stare of Dr. Bourdette. Then, without warning, he jerked his head back to stare straight at Crippen. Ha! he'd nearly caught Crippen that time! "You'd better be careful, Crippen—and all the rest of you! If I do see one of you move I'll smash you to pieces! Do you hear?"

He ought to go, he told himself. Already he had experienced enough to write his story, or ten stories, for the matter of that. Well, then, why not go? The *Morning Echo* would be none the wiser as to how long he had stayed, nor would it care so long as his story was a good one. Yes, but that night watchman upstairs would chaff him. And the manager—one never knew—perhaps the manager would quibble over that five-pound note which he needed so badly. He wondered if Rose were asleep or if she were lying awake and thinking of him. She'd laugh when he told her that he had imagined . . .

This was a little too much! It was bad enough that the wax-

work effigies of murderers should move when they weren't being watched, but it was intolerable that they should *breathe*. Somebody was breathing. Or was it his own breath which sounded to him as if it came from a distance? He sat rigid, listening and straining until he exhaled with a long sigh. His own breath after all, or—if not, Something had divined that he was listening and had ceased breathing simultaneously.

Hewson jerked his head swiftly around and looked all about him out of haggard and hunted eyes. Everywhere his gaze encountered the vacant waxen faces, and everywhere he felt that by just some least fraction of a second had he missed seeing a movement of hand or foot, a silent opening or compression of lips, a flicker of eyelids, a look of human intelligence now smoothed out. They were like naughty children in a class, whispering, fidgeting and laughing behind their teacher's back, but blandly innocent when his gaze was turned upon them.

This would not do! This distinctly would not do! He must clutch at something, grip with his mind upon something which belonged essentially to the workaday world, to the daylight London streets. He was Raymond Hewson, an unsuccessful journalist, a living and breathing man, and these figures grouped around him were only dummies, so they could neither move nor whisper. What did it matter if they were supposed to be lifelike effigies of murderers? They were only made of wax and sawdust, and stood there for the entertainment of morbid sightseers and orange-sucking trippers. That was better! Now what was that funny story which somebody had told him in the Falstaff yesterday? . . .

He recalled part of it, but not all, for the gaze of Dr. Bourdette, urged, challenged, and finally compelled him to turn.

Hewson half-turned, and then swung his chair so as to bring him face to face with the wearer of those dreadful hypnotic eyes. His own eyes were dilated, and his mouth, at first set in a grin of terror, lifted at the corners in a snarl. Then Hewson spoke and woke a hundred sinister echoes.

"You moved, damn you!" he cried. "Yes, you did, damn you! I saw you!"

Then he sat quite still, staring straight before him, like a man found frozen in the Arctic snows.

Dr. Bourdette's movements were leisurely. He stepped off his pedestal with the mincing care of a lady alighting from a 'bus. The platform stood about two feet from the ground, and above the edge of it a plush-covered rope hung in arc-like curves. Dr.

Bourdette lifted up the rope until it formed an arch for him to pass under, stepped off the platform and sat down on the edge facing Hewson. Then he nodded and smiled and said "Good evening."

"I need hardly tell you," he continued, in perfect English in which was traceable only the least foreign accent, "that not until I overheard the conversation between you and the worthy manager of this establishment, did I suspect that I should have the pleasure of a companion here for the night. You cannot move or speak without my bidding, but you can hear me perfectly well. Something tells me that you are—shall I say nervous? My dear sir, have no illusions. I am not one of these contemptible effigies miraculously come to life: I am Dr. Bourdette himself."

He paused, coughed and shifted his legs.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "but I am a little stiff. And let me explain. Circumstances with which I need not fatigue you, have made it desirable that I should live in England. I was close to this building this evening when I saw a policeman regarding me a thought too curiously. I guessed that he intended to follow and perhaps ask me embarrassing questions, so I mingled with the crowd and came in here. An extra coin bought my admission to the chamber in which we now meet, and an inspiration showed me a certain means of escape.

"I raised a cry of fire, and when all the fools had rushed to the stairs I stripped my effigy of the caped coat which you behold me wearing, donned it, hid my effigy under the platform at the back, and took its place on the pedestal.

"I own that I have since spent a very fatiguing evening, but fortunately I was not always being watched and had opportunities to draw an occasional deep breath and ease the rigidity of my pose. One small boy screamed and exclaimed that he saw me moving. I understood that he was to be whipped and put straight to bed on his return home, and I can only hope that the threat has been executed to the letter.

"The manager's description of me, which I had the embarrassment of being compelled to overhear, was biased but not altogether inaccurate. Clearly I am not dead, although it is as well that the world thinks otherwise. His account of my hobby, which I have indulged for years, although, through necessity, less frequently of late, was in the main true although not intelligently expressed. The world is divided between collectors and non-collectors. With the non-collectors we are not concerned. The

collectors collect anything, according to their individual tastes, from money to cigarette cards, from moths to matchboxes. I collect throats."

He paused again and regarded Hewson's throat with interest mingled with disfavour.

"I am obliged to the chance which brought us together to-night," he continued, "and perhaps it would seem ungrateful to complain. From motives of personal safety my activities have been somewhat curtailed of late years, and I am glad of this opportunity of gratifying my somewhat unusual whim. But you have a skinny neck, sir, if you will overlook a personal remark. I should never have selected you from choice. I like men with thick necks . . . thick red necks . . ."

He fumbled in an inside pocket and took out something which he tested against a wet forefinger and then proceeded to pass gently to and fro across the palm of his left hand.

"This is a little French razor," he remarked blandly. "They are not much used in England, but perhaps you know them? One strops them on wood. The blade, you will observe, is very narrow. They do not cut very deep, but deep enough. In just one little moment you shall see for yourself. I shall ask you the little civil question of all the polite barbers: Does the razor suit you, sir?"

He rose up, a diminutive but menacing figure of evil, and approached Hewson with the silent, furtive step of a hunting panther.

"You will have the goodness," he said, "to raise your chin a little. Thank you, and a little more. Just a little more. Ah, thank you! . . . *Merci, m'sieur . . . Ah, merci . . . merci. . . .*"

. . . . . .

Over one end of the chamber was a thick skylight of frosted glass which, by day, let in a few sickly and filtered rays from the floor above. After sunrise these began to mingle with the subdued light from the electric bulbs, and this mingled illumination added a certain ghastliness to a scene which needed no additional touch of horror.

The waxwork figures stood apathetically in their places, waiting to be admired or execrated by the crowds who would presently wander fearfully among them. In their midst, in the centre gang way, Hewson sat still, leaning far back in his arm-chair. His chin was uptilted as if he were waiting to receive attention from a

barber, and although there was not a scratch upon his throat, nor anywhere upon his body, he was cold and dead. His previous employers were wrong in having him credited with no imagination.

Dr. Bourdette on his pedestal watched the dead man unemotionally. He did not move, nor was he capable of motion. But then, after all, he was only a waxwork.

Stephen Crane

THE OPEN BOAT

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I

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colours of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. Many a man ought to have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea. These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth-top was a problem in small-boat navigation.

The cook squatted in the bottom and looked with both eyes at the six inches of gunwale which separated him from the ocean. His sleeves were rolled over his fat forearms, and the two flaps of his unbuttoned vest dangled as he bent to bail out the boat. Often he said: "Gawd! That was a narrow clip." As he remarked it he invariably gazed eastward over the broken sea.

The oiler, steering with one of the two oars in the boat, sometimes raised himself suddenly to keep clear of water that swirled in over the stern. It was a thin little oar and it seemed often ready to snap.

The correspondent, pulling at the other oar, watched the waves and wondered why he was there.

The injured captain, lying in the bow, was at this time buried in that profound dejection and indifference which comes, temporarily at least, to even the bravest and most enduring when, willy nilly, the firm fails, the army loses, the ship goes down. The mind of the master of a vessel is rooted deep in the timbers of her, though he commanded for a day or a decade, and this captain had on him the stern impression of a scene in the greys of dawn of seven turned faces, and later a stump of a top-mast with a white ball on it that slashed to and fro at the waves, went low and lower, and down. Thereafter there was something strange in his voice. Although steady, it was deep with mourning, and of a quality beyond oration or tears.

"Keep 'er a little more south, Billie," said he.

"'A little more south,' sir," said the oiler in the stern.

A seat in this boat was not unlike a seat upon a bucking broncho, and by the same token, a broncho is not much smaller. The craft pranced and reared, and plunged like an animal. As each wave came, and she rose for it, she seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high. The manner of her scramble over these walls of water is a mystic thing, and, moreover, at the top of them were ordinarily these problems in white water, the foam racing down from the summit of each wave, requiring a new leap, and a leap from the air. Then, after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide, and race, and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace.

A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats. In a ten-foot dingey one can get an idea of the resources of the sea in the line of waves that is not probable to the average experience which is never at sea in a dingey. As each slatey wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat, and it was not difficult to imagine that this particular wave was the final outburst of the ocean, the last effort of the grim water. There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests.

In the wan light, the faces of the men must have been grey. Their eyes must have glinted in strange ways as they gazed

steadily astern. Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had no time to see it, and if they had had leisure there were other things to occupy their minds. The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the color of the sea changed from slate to emerald-green, streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the color of the waves that rolled toward them.

In disjointed sentences the cook and the correspondent argued as to the difference between a life-saving station and a house of refuge. The cook had said: "There's a house of refuge just north of the Mosquito Inlet Light, and as soon as they see us, they'll come off in their boat and pick us up."

"As soon as who see us?" said the correspondent.

"The crew," said the cook.

"Houses of refuge don't have crews," said the correspondent. "As I understand them, they are only places where clothes and grub are stored for the benefit of shipwrecked people. They don't carry crews."

"Oh, yes, they do," said the cook.

"No, they don't," said the correspondent.

"Well, we're not there yet, anyhow," said the oiler, in the stern.

"Well," said the cook, "perhaps it's not a house of refuge that I'm thinking of as being near Mosquito Inlet Light. Perhaps it's a life-saving station."

"We're not there yet," said the oiler, in the stern.

II

As the boat bounced from the top of each wave, the wind tore through the hair of the hatless men, and as the craft plopped her stern down again the spray splashed past them. The crest of each of these waves was a hill, from the top of which the men surveyed, for a moment, a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber.

"Bully good thing it's an on-shore wind," said the cook. "If not, where would we be? Wouldn't have a show."

"That's right," said the correspondent.

The busy oiler nodded his assent.

Then the captain, in the bow, chuckled in a way that expressed humour, contempt, tragedy, all in one. "Do you think we've got much of a show now, boys?" said he.

Whereupon the three were silent, save for a trifle of hemming and hawing. To express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid, but they all doubtless possessed this sense of the situation in their mind. A young man thinks doggedly at such times. On the other hand, the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness. So they were silent.

"Oh, well," said the captain, soothing his children, "We'll get ashore all right."

But there was that in his tone which made them think, so the oiler quoth: "Yes! If this wind holds!"

The cook was bailing: "Yes! If we don't catch hell in the surf."

Canton flannel gulls flew near and far. Sometimes they sat down on the sea, near patches of brown seaweed that rolled on the waves with a movement like carpets on a line in a gale. The birds sat comfortably in groups, and they were envied by some in the dingey, for the wrath of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand miles inland. Often they came very close and stared at the men with black bead-like eyes. At these times they were uncanny and sinister in their unblinking scrutiny, and the men hooted angrily at them, telling them to be gone. One came, and evidently decided to alight on the top of the captain's head. The bird flew parallel to the boat and did not circle, but made short sidelong jumps in the air in chicken-fashion. His black eyes were wistfully fixed upon the captain's head. "Ugly brute," said the oiler to the bird. "You look as if you were made with a jack-knife." The cook and the correspondent swore darkly at the creature. The captain naturally wished to knock it away with the end of the heavy painter; but he did not dare do it, because anything resembling an emphatic gesture would have capsized this freighted boat, and so with his open hand, the captain gently and carefully waved the gull away. After it had been discouraged from the pursuit the captain breathed easier on account of his hair, and others breathed easier because the bird struck their minds at this time as being somehow grewsome and ominous.

In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed.

They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. The very ticklish part of the business was when the time came for the reclining one in the stern to take his turn at the oars. By the very last star of truth, it is easier to steal eggs from under a hen than it was to change seats in the dingey. First the man in the stern slid his hand along the thwart and moved with care, as if he were of Sèvres. Then the man in the rowing seat slid his hand along the other thwart. It was all done with the most extraordinary care. As the two sidled past each other, the whole party kept watchful eyes on the coming wave, and the captain cried: "Look out now! Steady there!"

The brown mats of seaweed that appeared from time to time were like islands, bits of earth. They were traveling, apparently, neither one way nor the other. They were, to all intents, stationary. They informed the men in the boat that it was making progress slowly toward the land.

The captain, rearing cautiously in the bow, after the dingey soared on a great swell, said that he had seen the lighthouse at Mosquito Inlet. Presently the cook remarked that he had seen it. The correspondent was at the oars then, and for some reason he too wished to look at the lighthouse, but his back was toward the far shore and the waves were important, and for some time he could not seize an opportunity to turn his head. But at last there came a wave more gentle than the others, and when at the crest of it he swiftly scoured the western horizon.

"See it?" said the captain.

"No," said the correspondent slowly, "I didn't see anything."

"Look again," said the captain. He pointed. "It's exactly in that direction."

At the top of another wave, the correspondent did as he was bid, and this time his eyes chanced on a small still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon. It was precisely like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find a lighthouse so tiny.

"Think we'll make it, captain?"

"If this wind holds and the boat don't swamp, we can't do much else," said the captain.

The little boat, lifted by each towering sea, and splashed vi-

ciously by the crests, made progress that in the absence of seaweed was not apparent to those in her. She seemed just a wee thing wallowing, miraculously top-up, at the mercy of five oceans. Occasionally, a great spread of water, like white flames, swarmed into her.

"Bail her, cook," said the captain serenely.

"All right, captain," said the cheerful cook.

III

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously ironbound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dingey. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. And after this devotion to the commander of the boat there was this comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life. But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it.

"I wish we had a sail," remarked the captain. "We might try my overcoat on the end of an oar and give you two boys a chance to rest." So the cook and the correspondent held the mast and spread wide the overcoat. The oiler steered, and the little boat made good way with her new rig. Sometimes the oiler had to scull sharply to keep a sea from breaking into the boat, but otherwise sailing was a success.

Meanwhile the lighthouse had been growing slowly larger. It had now almost assumed colour, and appeared like a little grey shadow on the sky. The man at the oars could not be prevented from turning his head rather often to try for a glimpse of this little grey shadow.

At last, from the top of each wave the men in the tossing boat could see land. Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly was thinner than paper. "We must be about opposite

New Smyrna," said the cook, who had coasted this shore often in schooners. "Captain, by the way, I believe they abandoned that life-saving station there about a year ago."

"Did they?" said the captain.

The wind slowly died away. The cook and the correspondent were not now obliged to slave in order to hold high the oar. But the waves continued their old impetuous swooping at the dingey, and the little craft, no longer under way, struggled woundily over them. The oiler or the correspondent took the oars again.

Shipwrecks are *à propos* of nothing. If men could only train for them and have them occur when the men had reached pink condition, there would be less drowning at sea. Of the four in the dingey none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dingey, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily.

For these reasons, and for others, neither the oiler nor the correspondent was fond of rowing at this time. The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical punishment, and even a genius of mental aberrations could never conclude that it was anything but a horror to the muscles and a crime against the back. He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary-faced oiler smiled in full sympathy. Previously to the foundering, by the way, the oiler had worked double-watch in the engine-room of the ship.

"Take her easy, now, boys," said the captain. "Don't spend yourselves. If we have to run a surf you'll need all your strength, because we'll sure have to swim for it. Take your time."

Slowly the land arose from the sea. From a black line it became a line of black and a line of white, trees and sand. Finally, the captain said that he could make out a house on the shore. "That's the house of refuge, sure," said the cook. "They'll see us before long, and come out after us."

The distant lighthouse reared high. "The keeper ought to be able to make us out now, if he's looking through a glass," said the captain. "He'll notify the life-saving people."

"None of those other boats could have got ashore to give word of the wreck," said the oiler, in a low voice. "Else the lifeboat would be out hunting us."

Slowly and beautifully the land loomed out of the sea. The

wind came again. It had veered from the north-east to the south-east. Finally, a new sound struck the ears of the men in the boat. It was the low thunder of the surf on the shore. "We'll never be able to make the lighthouse now," said the captain. "Swing her head a little more north, Billie," said he.

"'A little more north,' sir," said the oiler.

Whereupon the little boat turned her nose once more down the wind, and all but the oarsman watched the shore grow. Under the influence of this expansion doubt and direful apprehension was leaving the minds of the men. The management of the boat was still most absorbing, but it could not prevent a quiet cheerfulness. In an hour, perhaps, they would be ashore.

Their backbones had become thoroughly used to balancing in the boat, and they now rode this wild colt of a dingey like circus men. The correspondent thought that he had been drenched to the skin, but happening to feel in the top pocket of his coat, he found therein eight cigars. Four of them were soaked with sea-water; four were perfectly scathless. After a search, somebody produced three dry matches, and thereupon the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat, and with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at the big cigars and judged well and ill of all men. Everybody took a drink of water.

IV

"Cook," remarked the captain, "there don't seem to be any signs of life about your house of refuge."

"No," replied the cook. "Funny they don't see us!"

A broad stretch of lowly coast lay before the eyes of the men. It was of dunes topped with dark vegetation. The roar of the surf was plain, and sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach. A tiny house was blocked out black upon the sky. Southward, the slim lighthouse lifted its little grey length.

Tide, wind, and waves were swinging the dingey northward. "Funny they don't see us," said the men.

The surf's roar was here dulled, but its tone was, nevertheless, thunderous and mighty. As the boat swam over the great rollers, the men sat listening to this roar. "We'll swamp sure," said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not

know this fact, and in consequence they made dark and opprobrious remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life-savers. Four scowling men sat in the dingey and surpassed records in the invention of epithets.

"Funny they don't see us."

The lightheartedness of a former time had completely faded. To their sharpened minds it was easy to conjure pictures of all kinds of incompetency and blindness and, indeed, cowardice. There was the shore of the populous land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign.

"Well," said the captain, ultimately, "I suppose we'll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have strength left to swim after the boat swamps."

And so the oiler, who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscle. There was some thinking.

"If we don't all get ashore——" said the captain. "If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?"

They then briefly exchanged some addresses and admonitions. As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: "If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd. . . . But no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work." Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds: "Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!"

The billows that came at this time were more formidable. They seemed always just about to break and roll over the little boat in a turmoil of foam. There was a preparatory and long growl in the speech of them. No mind unused to the sea would have concluded that the dingey could ascend these sheer heights in

time. The shore was still afar. The oiler was a wily surfman. "Boys," he said swiftly, "she won't live three minutes more, and we're too far out to swim. Shall I take her to sea again, captain?"

"Yes! Go ahead!" said the captain.

This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf and took her safely to sea again.

There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water. Then somebody in gloom spoke. "Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now."

The gulls went in slanting flight up the wind toward the grey desolate east. A squall, marked by dingy clouds, and clouds brick-red, like smoke from a burning building, appeared from the south-east.

"What do you think of those life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?"

"Funny they haven't seen us."

"Maybe they think we're out here for sport! Maybe they think we're fishin'. Maybe they think we're damned fools."

It was a long afternoon. A changed tide tried to force them southward, but the wind and wave said northward. Far ahead, where coast-line, sea, and sky formed their mighty angle, there were little dots which seemed to indicate a city on the shore.

"St. Augustine?"

The captain shook his head. "Too near Mosquito Inlet."

And the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed. Then the oiler rowed. It was a weary business. The human back can become the seat of more aches and pains than are registered in books for the composite anatomy of a regiment. It is a limited area, but it can become the theatre of innumerable muscular conflicts, tangles, wrenches, knots, and other comforts.

"Did you ever like to row, Billie?" asked the correspondent.

"No," said the oiler. "Hang it!"

When one exchanged the rowing-seat for a place in the bottom of the boat, he suffered a bodily depression that caused him to be careless of everything save an obligation to wiggle one finger. There was cold sea-water swashing to and fro in the boat, and he lay in it. His head, pillowed on a thwart, was within an inch of the swirl of a wave crest, and sometimes a particularly obstreperous sea came in-board and drenched him once more. But these matters did not annoy him. It is almost certain that if the

boat had capsized he would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt sure that it was a great soft mattress.

"Look! There's a man on the shore!"

"Where?"

"There! See 'im? See 'im?"

"Yes, sure! He's walking along."

"Now he's stopped. Look! He's facing us!"

"He's waving at us!"

"So he is! By thunder!"

"Ah, now we're all right! Now we're all right! There'll be a boat out here for us in half-an-hour."

"He's going on. He's running. He's going up to that house there."

The remote beach seemed lower than the sea, and it required a searching glance to discern the little black figure. The captain saw a floating stick and they rowed to it. A bath-towel was by some weird chance in the boat, and, tying this on the stick, the captain waved it. The oarsman did not dare turn his head, so he was obliged to ask questions.

"What's he doing now?"

"He's standing still again. He's looking, I think. . . . There he goes again. Toward the house. . . . Now he's stopped again.

"Is he waving at us?"

"No, not now! he was, though."

"Look! There comes another man!"

"He's running."

"Look at him go, would you."

"Why, he's on a bicycle. Now he's met the other man. They're both waving at us. Look!"

"There comes something up the beach."

"What the devil is that thing?"

"Why it looks like a boat."

"Why, certainly it's a boat."

"No, it's on wheels."

"Yes, so it is. Well, that must be the life-boat. They drag them along shore on a wagon."

"That's the life-boat, sure."

"No, by ——, it's—it's an omnibus."

"I tell you it's a life-boat."

"It is not! It's an omnibus. I can see it plain. See? One of these big hotel omnibuses."

"By thunder, you're right. It's an omnibus, sure as fate. What do you suppose they are doing with an omnibus? Maybe they are going around collecting the life-crew, hey?"

"That's it, likely. Look! There's a fellow waving a little black flag. He's standing on the steps of the omnibus. There come those other two fellows. Now they're all talking together. Look at the fellow with the flag. Maybe he ain't waving it."

"That ain't a flag, is it? That's his coat. Why, certainly, that's his coat."

"So it is. It's his coat. He's taken it off and is waving it around his head. But would you look at him swing it."

"Oh, say, there isn't any life-saving station there. That's just a winter resort hotel omnibus that has brought over some of the boarders to see us drown."

"What's that idiot with the coat mean? What's he signaling, anyhow?"

"It looks as if he were trying to tell us to go north. There must be a life-saving station up there."

"No! He thinks we're fishing. Just giving us a merry hand. See? Ah, there, Willie!"

"Well, I wish I could make something out of those signals. What do you suppose he means?"

"He don't mean anything. He's just playing."

"Well, if he'd just signal us to try the surf again, or to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go to hell—there would be some reason in it. But look at him. He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving like a wheel. The ass!"

"There come more people."

"Now there's quite a mob. Look! Isn't that a boat?"

"Where? Oh, I see where you mean. No, that's no boat."

"That fellow is still waving his coat."

"He must think we like to see him do that. Why don't he quit it? It don't mean anything."

"I don't know. I think he is trying to make us go north. It must be that there's a life-saving station there somewhere."

"Say, he ain't tired yet. Look at 'im wave."

"Wonder how long he can keep that up. He's been revolving his coat ever since he caught sight of us. He's an idiot. Why aren't they getting men to bring a boat out? A fishing boat—one of those big yawls—could come out here all right. Why don't he do something?"

"Oh, it's all right now."

"They'll have a boat out here for us in less than no time, now that they've seen us."

A faint yellow tone came into the sky over the low land. The shadows on the sea slowly deepened. The wind bore coldness with it, and the men began to shiver.

"Holy smoke!" said one, allowing his voice to express his impious mood, "if we keep on monkeying out here! If we've got to flounder out here all night!"

"Oh, we'll never have to stay here all night! Don't you worry. They've seen us now, and it won't be long before they'll come chasing out after us."

The shore grew dusky. The man waving a coat blended gradually into this gloom, and it swallowed in the same manner the omnibus and the group of people. The spray, when it dashed uproariously over the side, made the voyagers shrink and swear like men who were being branded.

"I'd like to catch the chump who waved the coat. I feel like soaking him one, just for luck."

"Why? What did he do?"

"Oh, nothing, but then he seemed so damned cheerful."

In the meantime the oiler rowed, and then the correspondent rowed and then the oiler rowed. Grey-faced and bowed forward, they mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars. The form of the lighthouse had vanished from the southern horizon, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea. The streaked saffron in the west passed before the all-merging darkness, and the sea to the east was black. The land had vanished, and was expressed only by the low and drear thunder of the surf.

"If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life?"

The patient captain, drooped over the water-jar, was sometimes obliged to speak to the oarsman.

"Keep her head up! Keep her head up!"

"'Keep her head up,' sir." The voices were weary and low.

This was surely a quiet evening. All save the oarsman lay heavily and listlessly in the boat's bottom. As for him, his eyes

were just capable of noting the tall black waves that swept forward in a most sinister silence, save for an occasional subdued growl of a crest.

The cook's head was on a thwart, and he looked without interest at the water under his nose. He was deep in other scenes. Finally he spoke. "Billie," he murmured, dreamfully, "what kind of pie do you like best?"

V

"Pie," said the oiler and the correspondent, agitatedly. "Don't talk about those things, blast you!"

"Well," said the cook, "I was just thinking about ham sandwiches, and——"

A night on the sea in an open boat is a long night. As darkness settled finally, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea in the south, changed to full gold. On the northern horizon a new light appeared, a small bluish gleam on the edge of the waters. These two lights were the furniture of the world. Otherwise there was nothing but waves.

Two men huddled in the stern, and distances were so magnificent in the dingey that the rower was enabled to keep his feet partly warmed by thrusting them under his companions. Their legs indeed extended far under the rowing-seat until they touched the feet of the captain forward. Sometimes, despite the efforts of the tired oarsman, a wave came piling into the boat, an icy wave of the night, and the chilling water soaked them anew. They would twist their bodies for a moment and groan, and sleep the dead sleep once more, while the water in the boat gurgled about them as the craft rocked.

The plan of the oiler and the correspondent was for one to row until he lost the ability, and then arouse the other from his sea-water couch in the bottom of the boat.

The oiler plied the oars until his head drooped forward, and the overpowering sleep blinded him. And he rowed yet afterward. Then he touched a man in the bottom of the boat, and called his name. "Will you spell me for a little while?" he said, meekly.

"Sure, Billie," said the correspondent, awakening and dragging himself to a sitting position. They exchanged places carefully, and the oiler, cuddling down in the sea-water at the cook's side, seemed to go to sleep instantly.

The particular violence of the sea had ceased. The waves came

without snarling. The obligation of the man at the oars was to keep the boat headed so that the tilt of the rollers would not capsize her, and to preserve her from filling when the crests rushed past. The black waves were silent and hard to be seen in the darkness. Often one was almost upon the boat before the oarsman was aware.

In a low voice the correspondent addressed the captain. He was not sure that the captain was awake, although this iron man seemed to be always awake. "Captain, shall I keep her making for that light north, sir?"

The same steady voice answered him. "Yes. Keep it about two points off the port bow."

The cook had tied a life-belt around himself in order to get even the warmth which this clumsy cork contrivance could donate, and he seemed almost stove-like when a rower, whose teeth invariably chattered wildly as soon as he ceased his labor, dropped down to sleep.

The correspondent, as he rowed, looked down at the two men sleeping under-foot. The cook's arm was around the oiler's shoulders, and, with their fragmentary clothing and haggard faces, they were the babes of the sea, a grotesque rendering of the old babes in the wood.

Later he must have grown stupid at his work, for suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat, and it was a wonder that it did not set the cook afloat in his life-belt. The cook continued to sleep, but the oiler sat up, blinking his eyes and shaking with the new cold.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry, Billie," said the correspondent contritely.

"That's all right, old boy," said the oiler, and lay down again and was asleep.

Presently it seemed that even the captain dozed, and the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans. The wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end.

There was a long, loud swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters. It might have been made by a monstrous knife.

Then there came a stillness, while the correspondent breathed with the open mouth and looked at the sea.

Suddenly there was another swish and another long flash of

bluish light, and this time it was alongside the boat, and might almost have been reached with an oar. The correspondent saw an enormous fin speed like a shadow through the water, hurling the crystalline spray and leaving the long glowing trail.

The correspondent looked over his shoulder at the captain. His face was hidden, and he seemed to be asleep. He looked at the babes of the sea. They certainly were asleep. So, being bereft of sympathy, he leaned a little way to one side and swore softly into the sea.

But the thing did not then leave the vicinity of the boat. Ahead or astern, on one side or the other, at intervals long or short, fled the long sparkling streak, and there was to be heard the whirroo of the dark fin. The speed and power of the thing was greatly to be admired. It cut the water like a gigantic and keen projectile.

The presence of this biding thing did not affect the man with the same horror that it would if he had been a picnicker. He simply looked at the sea dully and swore in an undertone.

Nevertheless, it is true that he did not wish to be alone. He wished one of his companions to awaken by chance and keep him company with it. But the captain hung motionless over the water-jar, and the oiler and the cook in the bottom of the boat were plunged in slumber.

VI

"If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned —if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?"

During this dismal night, it may be remarked that a man would conclude that it was really the intention of the seven mad gods to drown him, despite the abominable injustice of it. For it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural. Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still——

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no brick and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.

Then, if there be no tangible thing to hoot he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands supplicant, saying: "Yes, but I love myself."

A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of the situation.

The men in the dingey had not discussed these matters, but each had, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to his mind. There was seldom any expression upon their faces save the general one of complete weariness. Speech was devoted to the business of the boat.

To chime the notes of his emotion, a verse mysteriously entered the correspondent's head. He had even forgotten that he had forgotten this verse, but it suddenly was in his mind.

"A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers,
There was a lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears;
But a comrade stood beside him, and he took that comrade's hand,
And he said: 'I shall never see my own, my native land.' "

In his childhood, the correspondent had been made acquainted with the fact that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, but he had never regarded the fact as important. Myriads of his school-fellows had informed him of the soldier's plight, but the dinning had naturally ended by making him perfectly indifferent. He had never considered it his affair that a soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers, nor had it appeared to him as a matter for sorrow. It was less to him that the breaking of a pencil's point.

Now, however, it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet, meanwhile drinking tea and warming his feet at the grate; it was an actuality—stern, mournful, and fine.

The correspondent plainly saw the soldier. He lay on the sand with his feet out straight and still. While his pale left hand was upon his chest in an attempt to thwart the going of his life, the blood came between his fingers. In the far Algerian distance, a city of low square forms was set against a sky that was faint with the last sunset hues. The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers.

The thing which had followed the boat and waited, had evidently grown bored at the delay. There was no longer to be heard the slash of the cut-water, and there was no longer the flame of the long trail. The light in the north still glimmered, but it was apparently no nearer to the boat. Sometimes the boom of the surf rang in the correspondent's ears, and he turned the craft seaward then and rowed harder. Southward, some one had evidently built a watch-fire on the beach. It was too low and too far to be seen, but it made a shimmering, roseate reflection upon the bluff back of it, and this could be discerned from the boat. The wind came stronger, and sometimes a wave suddenly raged out like a mountain-cat, and there was to be seen the sheen and sparkle of a broken crest.

The captain, in the bow, moved on his water-jar and sat erect. "Pretty long night," he observed to the correspondent. He looked at the shore. "Those life-saving people take their time."

"Did you see that shark playing around?"

"Yes, I saw him. He was a big fellow, all right."

"Wish I had known you were awake."

Later the correspondent spoke into the bottom of the boat.

"Billie!" There was a slow and gradual disentanglement. "Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

As soon as the correspondent touched the cold comfortable sea-water in the bottom of the boat, and had cuddled close to the cook's life-belt he was deep in sleep, despite the fact that his teeth played all the popular airs. This sleep was so good to him that it was but a moment before he heard a voice call his name in a tone that demonstrated the last stages of exhaustion. "Will you spell me?"

"Sure, Billie."

The light in the north had mysteriously vanished, but the correspondent took his course from the wide-awake captain.

Later in the night they took the boat farther out to sea, and the captain directed the cook to take one oar at the stern and keep the boat facing the seas. He was to call out if he should hear the thunder of the surf. This plan enabled the oiler and the correspondent to get respite together. "We'll give those boys a chance to get into shape again," said the captain. They curled down and, after a few preliminary chatterings and trembles, slept once more the dead sleep. Neither knew they had bequeathed

to the cook the company of another shark, or perhaps the same shark.

As the boat caroused on the waves, spray occasionally bumped over the side and gave them a fresh soaking, but this had no power to break their repose. The ominous slash of the wind and the water affected them as it would have affected mummies.

"Boys," said the cook, with the notes of every reluctance in his voice, "she's drifted in pretty close. I guess one of you had better take her to sea again." The correspondent aroused, heard the crash of the toppled crests.

As he was rowing, the captain gave him some whisky-and-water, and this steadied the chills out of him. "If I ever get ashore and anybody shows me even a photograph of an oar——"

At last there was a short conversation.

"Billie. . . . Billie, will you spell me?"

"Sure," said the oiler.

VII

When the correspondent again opened his eyes, the sea and the sky were each of the grey hue of the dawning. Later, carmine and gold was painted upon the waters. The morning appeared finally, in its splendour, with a sky of pure blue, and the sunlight flamed on the tips of the waves.

On the distant dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white windmill reared above them. No man, nor dog, nor bicycle appeared on the beach. The cottages might have formed a deserted village.

The voyagers scanned the shore. A conference was held in the boat. "Well," said the captain, "if no help is coming we might better try a run through the surf right away. If we stay out here much longer we will be too weak to do anything for ourselves at all." The others silently acquiesced in this reasoning. The boat was headed for the beach. The correspondent wondered if none ever ascended the tall wind-tower, and if then they never looked seaward. This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. It is,

perhaps, plausible that a man in this situation, impressed with the unconcern of the universe, should see the innumerable flaws of his life, and have them taste wickedly in his mind and wish for another chance. A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then, in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction or at a tea.

"Now, boys," said the captain, "she is going to swamp, sure. All we can do is to work her in as far as possible, and then when she swamps, pile out and scramble for the beach. Keep cool now, and don't jump until she swamps sure."

The oiler took the oars. Over his shoulders he scanned the surf. "Captain," he said, "I think I'd better bring her about, and keep her head-on to the seas and back her in."

"All right, Billie," said the captain. "Back her in." The oiler swung the boat then and, seated in the stern, the cook and the correspondent were obliged to look over their shoulders to contemplate the lonely and indifferent shore.

The monstrous in-shore rollers heaved the boat high until the men were again enabled to see the white sheets of water scudding up the slanted beach. "We won't get in very close," said the captain. Each time a man could wrest his attention from the rollers, he turned his glance toward the shore, and in the expression of the eyes during this contemplation there was a singular quality. The correspondent, observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning of their glances was shrouded.

As for himself, he was too tired to grapple fundamentally with the fact. He tried to coerce his mind into thinking of it, but the mind was dominated at this time by the muscles, and the muscles said they did not care. It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame.

There were no hurried words, no pallor, no plain agitation. The men simply looked at the shore. "Now, remember to get well clear of the boat when you jump," said the captain.

Seaward the crest of a roller suddenly fell with a thunderous crash, and the long white comber came roaring down upon the boat.

"Steady now," said the captain. The men were silent. They turned their eyes from the shore to the comber and waited. The boat slid up the incline, leaped at the furious top, bounced over

it, and swung down the long back of the wave. Some water had been shipped and the cook bailed it out.

But the next crest crashed also. The tumbling, boiling flood of white water caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular. Water swarmed in from all sides. The correspondent had his hands on the gunwale at this time, and when the water entered at that place he swiftly withdrew his fingers, as if he objected to wetting them.

The little boat, drunken with this weight of water, reeled and snuggled deeper into the sea.

"Bail her out, cook! Bail her out," said the captain.

"All right, captain," said the cook.

"Now, boys, the next one will do for us, sure," said the oiler. "Mind to jump clear of the boat."

The third wave moved forward, huge, furious, implacable. It fairly swallowed the dingey, and almost simultaneously the men tumbled into the sea. A piece of lifebelt had lain in the bottom of the boat, and as the correspondent went overboard he held this to his chest with his left hand.

The January water was icy, and he reflected immediately that it was colder than he had expected to find it on the coast of Florida. This appeared to his dazed mind as a fact important enough to be noted at the time. The coldness of the water was sad; it was tragic. This fact was somehow so mixed and confused with his opinion of his own situation that it seemed almost a proper reason for tears. The water was cold.

When he came to the surface he was conscious of little but the noisy water. Afterward he saw his companions in the sea. The oiler was ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly. Off to the correspondent's left, the cook's great white and corked back bulged out of the water, and in the rear the captain was hanging with his one good hand to the keel of the overturned dingey.

There is a certain immovable quality to a shore, and the correspondent wondered at it amid the confusion of the sea.

It seemed also very attractive, but the correspondent knew that it was a long journey, and he paddled leisurely. The piece of life-preserver lay under him, and sometimes he whirled down the incline of a wave as if he were on a hand-sled.

But finally he arrived at a place in the sea where travel was beset with difficulty. He did not pause swimming to inquire what manner of current had caught him, but there his progress

ceased. The shore was set before him like a bit of scenery on a stage, and he looked at it and understood with his eyes each detail of it.

As the cook passed, much farther to the left, the captain was calling to him, "Turn over on your back, cook! Turn over on your back and use the oar."

"All right, sir." The cook turned on his back, and, paddling with an oar, went ahead as if he were a canoe.

Presently the boat also passed to the left of the correspondent with the captain clinging with one hand to the keel. He would have appeared like a man raising himself to look over a board fence, if it were not for the extraordinary gymnastics of the boat. The correspondent marvelled that the captain could still hold to it.

They passed on, nearer to shore—the oiler, the cook, the captain—and following them went the water-jar, bouncing gaily over the seas.

The correspondent remained in the grip of this strange new enemy—a current. The shore, with its white slope of sand and its green bluff, topped with little silent cottages, was spread like a picture before him. It was very near to him then, but he was impressed as one who in a gallery looks at a scene from Brittany or Holland.

He thought: "I am going to drown? Can it be possible? Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" Perhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature.

But later a wave perhaps whirled him out of this small, deadly current, for he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore. Later still, he was aware that the captain, clinging with one hand to the keel of the dingey, had his face turned away from the shore and toward him, and was calling his name. "Come to the boat! Come to the boat!"

In his struggle to reach the captain and the boat, he reflected that when one gets properly wearied, drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief, and he was glad of it, for the main thing in his mind for some months had been horror of the temporary agony. He did not wish to be hurt.

Presently he saw a man running along the shore. He was undressing with most remarkable speed. Coat, trousers, shirt, everything flew magically off him.

"Come to the boat," called the captain.

"All right, captain." As the correspondent paddled, he saw the captain let himself down to bottom and leave the boat. Then the correspondent performed his one little marvel of the voyage. A large wave caught him and flung him with ease and supreme speed completely over the boat and far beyond it. It struck him even then as an event in gymnastics, and a true miracle of the sea. An over-turned boat in the surf is not a plaything to a swimming man.

The correspondent arrived in water that reached only to his waist, but his condition did not enable him to stand for more than a moment. Each wave knocked him into a heap, and the under-tow pulled at him.

Then he saw the man who had been running and undressing, and undressing and running, come bounding into the water. He dragged ashore the cook, and then waded towards the captain, but the captain waved him away, and sent him to the correspondent. He was naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint. He gave a strong pull, and a long drag, and a bully heave at the correspondent's hand. The correspondent, schooled in the minor formulæ, said: "Thanks, old man." But suddenly the man cried: "What's that?" He pointed a swift finger. The correspondent said: "Go."

In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehead touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea.

The correspondent did not know all that transpired afterward. When he achieved safe ground he fell, striking the sand with each particular part of his body. It was as if he had dropped from a roof, but the thud was grateful to him.

It seems that instantly the beach was populated with men with blankets, clothes, and flasks, and women with coffee-pots and all the remedies sacred to their minds. The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it could only be the different and sinister hospitality of the grave.

When it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters.

Clemence Dane

THE KING WAITS

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The morning was a Friday, the month was May; it was the twenty-eighth year of the Eighth Henry's reign over England, and it needed five minutes to be noon. On Richmond Hill, under the great spring-leaved oak, stood Henry the King. His outstretched hand commanded silence, and his huntsmen stilled the restless coupled hounds in dumb show, with furtive, sidelong glances, fearing that outstretched jewel-laden hand, that arrogant glance. Who will disobey Harry the King, calling in that furious voice for silence? Even the midday sun, as a little cloud slipped from its face, poured down such an answering concentration of heat upon the green hill-side that the noon hush seemed an act of grace from one royalty to another. There was instantly no sound at all save the panting of the half-throttled hounds and the dry whisper of innumerable caterpillars hissing in innumerable leaves; for there was a blight that spring in the oak-woods.

For one minute—two—three—the silence endured; then a burst of wind broke it: and all the trees in Richmond Park began once more to strain, creak, rustle, and the scent of the May drifted by again in gusts, and high overhead the clouds too renewed their voyage eastward through the heavenly blue. Over the Tower of London, as the wind lulled once more, they banked together again, a white tower of the sky.

Far below the scent of the white may drifted over the town and in through the windows, doorways, and courtyards of the Tower, and over the Tower green. Through slits in the wall the river sparkled in the noon sunshine; but still it lacked four minutes to be noon.

Across the green to the new scaffold came Anne the Queen, dressed in black damask with a white cape, and her hat was in the fashion. The Lieutenant of the Tower helped her to mount the steps. She had her glance and her nod for the waiting swordsman; then she looked down upon her friends and upon her enemies gathered close about her harsh death-bed; said to them that which was in her mind to say; adjusted her dress and freed the small neck; then knelt. But she would not let friend or enemy cover her eyes, and though she knelt she did not bow her head,

but looked again keenly upon the silenced crowd: and for the last time called upon the ready blood to flush her cheeks.

She had always been able to redden thus into beauty when she chose; and now the hot blood did not fail her. It was at its old trick, brightening her black eyes: and this was ever the sign of crisis with her. With that sudden flush she had won her game—how often?—with this king and husband who had now beaten her. She felt a strange pang of longing to remember, to finger once again her glorious victories over time, absence, malice, envy, a queen, a cardinal, a king—and her own resentful heart.

She was not used to deny herself any wish; so, lifting her head, she let the spell work for the last time: and her executioner, meeting that full glance, hesitated and turned aside, as if his part were not yet ready to be played. Again he advanced: again she looked at him, and had the last triumph of her beauty as she won her respite. He would wait her pleasure for a minute, no more than a minute; but she knew now that the tales they had told of drowning men were true. The dying see their lives in a minute: she, dying, would see again her life.

She turned her eyes away from the frightened faces of her women, from faithful Mary Wyatt's weeping agony: she looked in turn upon her gaoler Kingston, on courteous Gwynn clutching in his hand her last gift, on thankless Cromwell, on Suffolk's exultant face. But here her glance checked, her very heart checked on its beat, for beside Suffolk, her enemy, stood a nearer enemy; it seemed to her that her husband's eyes glittered at her, set in a younger, comelier countenance. So Henry had sent his bastard to watch her die! She smiled to herself as she thought that it was like him, like her fool and tyrant, her Henry, husband, king! She thought that he himself would have been glad to watch her die: he could not for his dignity, so he sent his left-hand son, young Richmond. Yes, to act thus was like Henry, and young Richmond, watching her, was very like Henry: she had seen on many a May morning that eager parting of the full, pinched mouth, that glistening of small, hard eyes.

Suddenly her thirty-odd years of life began to speed across her eyeballs, quickly and softly, like the scudding clouds above her speeding over the Tower in the spring wind. Childhood and youth at Hever Castle—in a flash she saw those spring years pass, and herself journeying to France in the train of Henry's sister. Little thought fifteen-year-old Anne Boleyn that she would ever call the Queen of France sister! But she saw herself, never-

theless, all unconscious, dancing, dressing, laughing, learning, learning always to be a queen. And so home again to England, to the Court at Windsor Castle, like that last lone small cloud above her scudding across the sky to join the massed castles of the air. And there she saw herself for a little while serving the good dull Katharine; but she had no memory of Katharine's lord, Henry King of England. Another face and form flitted across her eyeballs, of another Henry—Henry Percy, heir to the dukedom of Northumberland.

A high wind drove in upon the clouds as she watched, and scattered them all ways, while the executioner whispered with his underling. Thus boisterously, she thought, had Henry the King driven in upon love and lovers. Henry Percy is rated by the butcher's son, Wolsey, the hated cardinal; and his father summoned; and shamed Anne is dismissed the Court.

Home again goes Anne to Hever, her marriage and her heart broken, and never knows, so innocent is this earlier Anne, why misfortune cut off her happiness at a blow, like a skilled swordsman striking off a queen's head. But when a guest arrived at Hever Castle—then Anne knows!

Henry the King comes to Hever very sure of his welcome. And indeed her father and her stepmother may scour the county for fish, flesh, fowl and fruits in their season; and summon country gentlemen and ladies, and handsome boys and pleasant girls, to make feasts and plan pleasures for the King. But Maistresse Anne keeps her chamber. Henry is master of Hever, not of Anne. Anne knows now who has parted her, with Wolsey's help, from Henry Percy, true love, first love, and she will teach that greedy mouth, those glistening eyes, a lesson. Henry the King is the singular good lord and favourable prince of Sir Thomas and Lady Boleyn; but Maistresse Anne Boleyn keeps her chamber. Let the King learn what it means to part lovers! Let him wait and chafe and learn!

She watched him in memory once more as he rode away from Hever, an angry, hungry king, spurring his horse. She watched him and his train dwindling in the distance to such ant-like folk and swallowed up by young green and pure white may hedges, under just such a blue sky in just such windy weather. What a wind! There's no sound at all in the world but the hurry of the royal wind. When will it strike twelve? Is it a minute or a lifetime since she knelt?

More clouds scud across the sky, more years scud across her

dying eyes. She saw again her father, and smiled as she remembered that he, too, had been among those who condemned her. Strange father! Coward father! But he had liked his new title, all those years ago—Viscount Rochford sounded well; and her sister's husband was glad enough to be Gentleman of the Privy Chamber; and for herself there was a place at Court again, and jewels! (But Henry Percy is exiled to Northumberland!) Once more she saw that greedy mouth; once more she fell very humbly on her knees, summoned the lovely blood to her cheek, and said her say to Henry the King:

"Your wife I cannot be, both in respect of mine own unworthiness, and also because you have a queen already. Your mistress I will not be."

And so home again to Hever in just such soft blue weather, to read humble letters from a once blustering king, who knows now what it means to be a lover parted from his love. How did his letter go?

"I beseech you earnestly to let me know your real mind as to the love between us. . . . If it does not please you to answer me in writing, let me know some place where I may have it by word of mouth; and I will go thither with all my heart. No more for fear of tiring you."

But he tires her none the less, and she will not go to meet him. Let him wait! Let him wait his four years!

They scud by like clouds, as her cheek burns with a new memory of hate and reckoning. What of Wolsey? How shall Wolsey be paid if Anne pines at Hever while the King waits unsatisfied?

So Anne Boleyn comes to town again and serves the Queen again, and takes her place at last as King's bliss: queens it at Hampton, at Windsor, and at Greenwich, and holds her state in the Cardinal's own York House. How else should Wolsey be taught what it is to part lovers? (But Henry Percy has married a wife and will not come again!) Let Wolsey learn what he has to pay for crossing "the foolish girl yonder in the Court."

She saw herself again, while Katharine, her mistress, sat weeping and praying and sewing with her dull maids, reigning at the feasts the shaken Cardinal prepared for her; saw herself May Queen on May mornings and Lady of the Revels on Christmas Eves; till, at the Greenwich midnight masque, the French ambassador watching, she danced (mark it, butcher's son!) in public with the King, the flush upon her cheek, and listened afterwards to Henry's own song:—

The eagle force subdues each bird that flies:
What metal can resist the flaming fire?
Doth not the sun dazzle the clearest eyes,
And melt the ice and make the frost retire?

The ice, indeed, is melting, Lord Cardinal! You were not wise to go to France; less wise when you returned to dissuade a king from changing old queens for new. Anne Boleyn has other weapons than her brilliant eyes, her burning cheek, her dancing feet, and quick tongue. Henry has been jealous once; he shall be jealous again! King Henry is not the only lover who sings to Anne his own verses. Besides, Tom Wyatt has a look of Henry Percy (married, out of sight, never out of mind!), and is a bolder man than Percy.

She lived again through the day when Henry stole a ring from her finger and swaggered out to play at bowls with Wyatt. Again she watched all from her window, and heard all—King Henry crying out that he wins: and Wyatt telling him that, by his leave, it is not so!—and Henry's chuckle as he points with his new-ringed finger, crying:

"Wyatt, I tell thee, it is mine!"

But Wyatt, too, wears a keepsake under his Court suit over his heart. What can a poet and a lover do but draw from that hiding-place the jewel swinging on its chain.

"Give me leave to measure the cast with this, and I have good hopes yet it will be mine!"

Once again she saw him stoop, measure, and prove winner; and rise to face the Tudor thunderstorm.

"It may be so, but then I am deceived." And away storms Henry to her chamber crying—"What is Wyatt to you?"

She remembered how easily then she dealt with him and his jealousies: how she struck her bargain: and how, five years later, while she, the new-made Marchioness of Pembroke, sat on the King's knee, and he kissed her, not caring who saw, she heard Wyatt's voice singing to her new ladies-in-waiting his farewell song—

Forget not yet thine own approved,
The which so constant hath thee loved,
Whose steadfast faith has never moved;
Forget not yet!

Poor Tom Wyatt! The scent of the may drifts across the scaffold like the scent of the rose-water that it was his office to pour

upon her hands on her coronation day. And there was another May morning to remember—the best to remember!

The flush on her cheek deepened, and her head sank as she saw herself three years ago, only three years ago, journeying to the Tower, this same Tower that now witnessed her last journey's end. She saw the press of cheering folk at Greenwich, the branches of the oaks cracking under the weight of citizens, the may-bushes clambered over, with gaping faces thrust out, scratched and red and laughable between the pure clots of bloom. She saw again the Lord Mayor and his scarlet haberdashers, and felt the jewels on his glove dent her fingers as she put her hand in his that he might lead her to the State barge.

It waited for her on the breast of the sparkling river, the same sparkling river sparkling now through slits in her prison walls. But then the river was alive with pageantry, and instead of black damask she wore cloth of gold; and the world was full of noise where now was deadly silence and the executioner's foot behind her, breaking the silence.

But her mind rejected utterly that stealthy sound: it was filled with memories of the glorious noises—the cries of all the people and the tinkling of the fluttering, bell-sewn flags as the barge poled out into mid-stream with fifty lesser barges following. All London moved that May morning with her towards the Tower, so that her progress turned the very Thames back upon its course. (Why not when she, Anne Boleyn, had already turned back history, shaken Spain, defeated Rome, killed a cardinal, and wrecked a queen?) The great fiery dragon spat fire from the foist, and from the bachelor barge came trumpet-calls once more, and, from the maiden's barge, unceasing high-pitched singing, sweet as the singing of the waking birds had been when she met Henry Percy, not Henry of England, by stealth under the Greenwich hawthorn trees. Well, she had avenged that lost sweetness! Wolsey had parted her from Henry Percy, and where was Wolsey now? fallen, as she was falling: dead, as she in another instant must lie dead! But Henry Percy had been gaoler to the great cardinal before the end, had led the cardinal, his legs bound beneath his horse's belly like any other felon, to his prison and his grave. She had taught the greatest man in England what it cost to part lovers.

A smile lit up her face as she remembered that lesson, and the watchers saw it and wondered, and weeping Mary Wyatt called

her in her heart "saint" and "innocent"; and young Richmond thought of his father, waiting on Richmond Hill for the boom of the cannon, and wondered if he should report that inexplicable, triumphant smile. How slowly the man from Calais goes about his business! Look, he swings his sword! Does the kneeling creature know that the French executioner is swinging his sword?

But Anne did not see the present. She was smiling at her achieved past. She saw that she had done what she set out to do unafraid. She could say, when her sins rose up and looked at her, that she had never, in life or death, been made afraid. She had been fit mother for kings and queens: and—who knows? Wheels turn!—her Elizabeth might yet rule England, like her mother, unafraid! She saw again so clearly, lying open before her, the book of prophecies found once in her room, hidden there to frighten her by friends of Katharine. There had been a picture of Henry and weeping Katharine, and herself between them, kneeling at the block even as she knelt now. But when her frightened maid called out, "If this were prophesied of me, I would not have him, were he emperor!" she had answered—

"I am resolved to have him, that my issue may be royal, whatever may become of me."

She murmured the words again half aloud, and heard Mary's gasp from the scaffold foot—"She prays!" and saw the sudden upward flash of faces, watching a movement that she heard behind her but could not see. What? had so many years, had her whole life flashed before her eyes in so brief a minute? Yet the minute was too long, it seemed, for these watchers! Thy grew impatient and would hurry her into death. Let them know that the Queen dies at her own minute, not at theirs! Not thus had they hurried her two years ago from Greenwich landing to the Tower. They had led her slowly to the Tower then, that all the town might see her beauty. And Henry, her king and husband, had met her in the gateway and welcomed her most joyfully. She felt again upon her lips his loving kiss, and his great arm flung about her neck.

It fell upon her neck again like an all-ending blow; and there was a booming in her ears. . . .

The echoes of the gun went rolling round and out over the Tower walls, went rolling over the City and its suburbs, went rolling with the river up to Richmond Hill. Henry the King, motionless beneath the oak, like a painted monarch, like a card-

king of hearts, heard the heavy voice and understood the awaited, welcome message.

He started joyfully from his trance and, stripping a little ring from his finger, flung it into a bloom-laden may-thorn bush ten yards away.

"The deed is done!" cried Henry. "Uncouple the hounds and away!"

He clambered to his saddle while the statues of his huntsmen, his horses, and his hounds came to life about him, and, spurring his eager beast, led the hunt westward, ever westward, towards Wiltshire and Jane Seymour, and his wedding morrow.

Walter De La Mare

THE TREE

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Encased in his dingy first-class railway carriage, the prosperous Fruit Merchant sat alone. From the collar of his thick frieze great-coat stuck out a triangular nose. On either side of it a small, bleak, black eye gazed absently at one of the buttons on the empty blue-upholstered seat opposite to him. His breath spread a fading vapour in the air. He sat bolt upright, congealed in body, heated in mind, his unseeing eye fixed on that cloth button, that stud.

There was nothing else to look at, for his six narrow glass windows were whitelysheeted with hoar-frost. Only his thoughts were his company, while the coach, the superannuated coach, bumped dully on over the metals. And his thoughts were neither a satisfaction nor a pleasure. His square hard head under his square hard hat was nothing but a pot seething with vexation, scorn, and discontent.

What had invited him out so far, in weather so dismal, on a line so feebly patronised? Anger all but sparkled in his mind as he considered the intention of his journey, and what was likely to be the end and outcome of it. Twelve solid yet fleeting years divided him from his last encounter with his half-brother—

twelve *cent. per cent.* years—shipload on shipload of exotic oranges and lemons, pineapples, figs, and blushing pomegranates. At this very moment three more or less seaworthy ocean tramps were steaming across the watery channels of the world laden with cargoes of which he was the principal consignee. He stretched out his legs, crossed his feet. He was a substantial man. There was nothing fantastic about *him*.

To put on airs when you couldn't afford them; to meet a friendly offer with rank ingratitude; to quarrel with the only relative on earth who had kept you out of the workhouse—he had sworn never to set foot in the place again. Yet—here he was: and nothing but a fool for his pains. Having washed his hands of the whole silly business, he should have kept them washed. Instead of which he thrust them deeper into his capacious pockets and wondered to heaven when his journey was to come to an end.

No, it was with no charitable, no friendly, no sentimental motive that he was being glided joltingly on. A half-brother—and particularly if he owes you a hundred pounds and more—need not be even fractionally a being one smiles to think of for the sake of auld lang syne. There was nothing in common between the two of them, except a father now twenty-five years in his grave and a loan that would never be repaid.

That was one galling feature of the situation. There was another. In plain print and in his own respectable morning newspaper the Fruit Merchant had chanced but a week or two ago on the preposterous fact that a mere woodcut of a mere "Bird and Flower," initialled P. P., had fetched at Christie's ninety-seven guineas. Ninety-seven guineas: sixty-eight crates of excellent Denia oranges at thirty shillings a crate. What the devil! His small eyes seemed to congest and yet at the same time to protrude from their sockets.

"P. P."!—perfect pest; paltry poser; plaguey parasite. And yet—hardly a parasite. You couldn't with a term like that dish a half-brother who hadn't sent you a single word of greeting for twelve solid fleeting prosperous years. Even if he did owe you a hundred pounds. Even if he hadn't the faintest wish to remind you of the fact. Not that the Fruit Merchant *wanted* his hundred pounds. He wasn't a debt collector. He wasn't even vindictive. It was the principle of the thing.

For if half an hour's silly scratching over a little lump of wood could fetch you £101 17*s*., about twenty-nine and a half minutes

would bring in a round hundred. And there were more birds and more flowers in that infernal tree than Noah could have found room for in his Ark. The tree!—the very thought of it swept a pulsating cloud of rage over the Fruit Merchant's eyes. Cool, quiet insolence—he could have forgiven that, and could almost have forgotten it. But the faintest recollection of the tree, and of the talk under it, never failed to infuriate him. It infuriated him now almost beyond endurance, simply because he knew, in the secrecy of his thoughts, that *this* was the decoy which was dragging him on these fifty-three interminable miles on a freezing hideous country afternoon.

The tree: never in all his life had he met with such an exhibition of sheer, stark, midsummer madness. And yet with every inch of his journey the recollection grew on him. He couldn't get it out of his head. Curiosity, resentment, vindictiveness, a cold creeping cunning—a score of conflicting emotions zigzagged to and fro in his mind. He glared through them at the walls of his cage. But worst outrage of all was the creeping realisation—and his body stiffened at the thought—that he was even now, and perhaps even a little more than ever, afraid of the tree. When you finally deal with a relative and a bloodsucker who has been a pest to you all your life, the one thing you do not look for is an interference of that kind.

He could not deny it, the tree had impressed him. Ever since that first swimming stare at it, the moment he thought of his brother, of the country, even of his boyhood—there it was. It had impressed him so much that the upholstered button had now completely disappeared, and he seemed to be actually in the presence of it again. He saw it as vividly as if its image hung there before his very eyes in the slightly self-warmed air of his solitary compartment. The experience filled him with so sudden a flood of aversion and resentment that the voice of the guard chaunting the name of his destination reached him only just in time to set him frantically pulling down his frozen window and ejecting himself out of the train.

One hasty glance around him showed that he was the sole traveller to alight on the frosted timbers of the obscure little station. A faint rosiness in the west foretold the decline of the still wintry day. The firs that flanked the dreary passenger-shed of the platform stood burdened already with the blackness of coming night.

He was elderly, he was obese, his heart was none too sound, at

least as compared with his head. Yet if he intended to catch the last train home, he had scarcely a couple of hours in which to reach his half-brother's wretched little house, to congratulate him on his guineas, to refuse to accept repayment of his loan, to sneer at his tree, and to return to the station.

A bark at a weedy young porter in mittens, with mouth ajar over his long teeth, sent him ambling off for a conveyance. The Fruit Merchant stood under the shed in his frieze coat and square hard hat and watched the train glide out of the station. The screech of its engine, horning up into the windless air, had exactly expressed his own peculiar sentiments.

There was not a living being in sight whereon to breathe a curse. Only himself, a self he had been vaguely cursing throughout his tedious journey. The frozen landscape lay white in the dying day. The sun hung like the yolk of an egg above the still horizon. Some menace in the very look of this sullen object hinted that P. P. might long since have crossed the bourne from which no belated draft on any earthly bank had ever been known to transpire.

The thought diverted into ruggeder channels the current of the talk which he had intended to engage in with his half-brother. In other words, he would give the silly fool a bit of his mind. The fact was, their last quarrel—if anything so one-sided could be called a quarrel—had tinctured the Fruit Merchant's outlook on the world a good deal more densely than he would until now have confessed. A frown settled above the sullen eyes.

No living creature, no sound stirred the air. The fair country lay cold as if in a swoon. Like a shallow inverted saucer a becalmed sky curved itself over the unbroken quiet of the fields. His broad cleft chin thrust into his muffler, his hands into his capacious pockets, the stranger to these parts stood waiting, just stood there, with his small black eyes staring desolately out of his clothes. Why, you might just as well be marooned in a foreign land, or on a stage—sinister, cold, vacant, and not a single soul in the audience. At the sound of wheels and hoofs he coughed as if in uncontrollable indignation; and turned smartly on his heels. . . .

With a gesture of disdain the Fruit Merchant sourly thrust a shilling into the weedy porter's immense knuckled hand and mounted into the cab. At his onset the whole square fusty interior leaned towards him like an extinguisher over the stub of a candle. The vehicle disgraced the universe. Even the man on the

box resembled some little cautious and obscure animal that had been dug up out of the earth. When given his direction his face had fallen into an indescribable expression beneath its whiskers: an expression, it appeared, which was its nearest approach to a smile.

"And don't spare your—horse," had barked his fare, slamming the rickety door behind him.

A railway carriage even of the most antique description, when its glass is opaque with rime, is a little less like a prison cell than a four-wheeled cab. For which reason, perhaps, as the vehicle ground on beneath the misty leafless elms, the frigid air was allowed to beat softly in from the open window upon its occupant's slightly impurpled face.

And still on and on, now here, now there, memory retrieved for the sombre shape within it every incident of his last experience on this self-same road. It had been summertime—June. He had been twelve years younger, a good gross of years less prosperous, and not perhaps quite so easily fanned into a peculiar helpless state of rage.

Indeed, his actual meeting with his half-brother at the little white garden gate had been almost friendly. So friendly that it would hardly have been supposed they were in any way unpleasingly related to one another, or that the least responsibility of each to each could have caused any kind of festering recrimination. Not that P. P. was even then the kind of person one hastens to introduce to one's friends. You not only never knew how he would look or what he would say. You weren't even certain what he might do. A rolling stone that merely fails to gather moss is a harmless object by comparison with one that appears to gather momentum. And even the most trifling suggestion, not so much of eccentricity, as of an alien and crooked gleam in the eye, is apt to make the most respectable company a little uneasy.

Not that the two half-brothers had ever discussed together their aims and intentions and ideas about life; their desires or motives or hopes, or aversions or apprehensions or prejudices. The Fruit Merchant had his fair share of most of these human incentives, but he also had principles, and one of them was to keep his mouth shut.

They had met, had shaken hands, had exchanged remarks on the weather. Then P. P., in his frayed jacket and slippers, with his meagre expressionless face, had aimlessly led off his visitor

into the garden, had aimlessly dropped a few distant remarks about their common past; and then, surrounded as they were by the scenery, scents, and noises of summer, had pushed his knotted hands into his trousers pockets, and fallen silent; his grey, vacant eyes fixed on the tree. The Fruit Merchant had tried in vain to break the silence, to shrug his way out of it. He also could only stand and stare up and up—at the tree.

Solitary, unchallenged, exotic in its station all but at the foot of the broken-hedged, straggling garden, it rose to heaven, a prodigious spreading ascendant cone, with its long, dark, green, pointed leaves. It stood, from first springing branch to apex, a motionless and somnolent fountain of flowers.

If his half-brother had taken the Fruit Merchant into a dingy little greenhouse and had shown him an ailing plant that with care, water, and guano had been raised from some far-fetched seed—well, that might have been something to boast about. He himself was in the trade. He knew a Jaffa orange from a mandarin. The stuff has to *grow,* of course; and he was broad-minded enough to approve of rural enterprise. Giant Mangolds and Prize Pumpkins—they did no harm. They encouraged the human vegetable. But the . . .

At last he had come to his senses and had peered fretfully about him. The garden was a waste, the hedges untrimmed, a rank lusty growth of weeds flaunted their flowers at the sun. And this tree—it must have been flourishing here for centuries past, a positive eyesore to any practical gardener. P. P. couldn't even put a name to it. Yet by the fixed idiotic dreamy look on his face you might have supposed it was a gift from heaven; that, having waved his hands about like those coloured humbugs with the mango, the thing had sprung up by sheer magic out of the ground.

Not that the Fruit Merchant had denied that it was unique. He had never seen, nor would he ever want to see, its double. The sun had beaten down upon his head; a low, enormous drone filled the air; the reflected light dazed his eyes. A momentary faintness had stolen over him as he had turned once more and glanced again into his half-brother's long bony face—the absent eyes, the prominent cheek, the greying hair dappled with sunlight.

"How do you *know* it's unique?" he had asked. "It may be as common as blackberries in other parts of the country—or abroad. One of the officers of the *Catamaran* was telling me . . ."

"I don't know," his half-brother had interrupted him, "but I have been looking at trees all my life. This resembles all, re-

minds me of none. Besides, I'm not going abroad—at least for the present."

What had he meant by that? The Fruit Merchant hadn't inquired; had merely stood there in the flowers and grasses, blinking up once more into the spreading branches, almost involuntarily shaking his head at the pungent sweetness that hung dense and sickly in the air. And the old familiar symptoms began to stir in him, as he now sat jolting on in his cab—symptoms which his intimates would have described in one word: fuming.

He was not denying it, not he—the tree had been remarkable as trees go. For one thing, it bore two distinct kinds and shapes of blossom. The one circular and full and milky in a dark cuplike calyx, with clusters of scarlet-tipped pistils; the other a pale yellow oval, three-petalled, with a central splash of orange. He had surreptitiously squeezed a couple of the fallen flowers into his pocket-book, had taken them out at his office in the Borough the next morning to show them to the partner he had afterwards advantageously bought out of the business, only to find them black, slimy, and unrecognisable, and to be laughed at for his pains.

"What's the use of the thing?" he had next inquired of his half-brother in a gross voice. "Is it edible?" At which, with the faint smile on his face that had infuriated the Fruit Merchant even as a boy, the other had merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not try it on the pigs?"

"I don't keep pigs."

Keep pigs, indeed; there wasn't the faintest symptom that he would ever be able to keep himself!

"Well, aren't there any birds in these parts?" It had been a singularly false move.

"It has brought its own," had been his half-brother's muttered retort.

There was no denying it—at least so far as the Fruit Merchant's small ornithological knowledge went. At that very moment birds of a peculiarly vivid green sheeniness were hovering and dipping between the deep blue of the sky and the mountainous blossoming. Little birds, with unusually long and attenuated bills, playing, fluttering, lisping, courting, and apparently sucking the heady nectar from the snowy and ivory cups, while poised like animate gems on the wing. He had again opened his mouth, but his half-brother had laid a lean tingling hand on his sleeve. "Listen!" he said.

Half-stifled, jetting, delirious bursts of song twinkled, belled, rose, eddied, overflowed from the tented depths of the tree, like the yells and laughter of a playground of children suddenly released for an unexpected half-holiday. Listen, indeed! The noise of the creatures was still echoing in his ears as he sat there bulkily swaying, his eyes fixed on the pallid, gliding hedgerow from his fusty cab.

P. P. had not positively claimed that every single chorister in the chorus was an exotic visitant. He had gone further. He had gently bent down a low-lying fan of leaves and bloom, and not content with exhibiting one by one living specimens of a little spotted blue iridescent beetle, a horned kind of cockchafer, and a dappled, black-and-yellow-mottled ladybird—all of them following their lives in these surroundings; he had also waved a lean hand in the direction of a couple of gaudy butterflies intertwining in flight down the slope of the garden, had pointed out little clumps of saffron and sky-blue flowers, and a rank, ungainly weed with a cluster of black helmet-shaped florets at its tips, asserting that they were as rare—as unprecedented—in those parts as the tree itself.

"You don't mean to say because the thing's brought its own vermin that it's any the better for that? Lord, we can do that in the fruit trade."

"It's brought me," said the other, mooning meanwhile in the opposite direction.

"And where do you raise your pertatoes and artichokes and scarlet runners? It looks to me like a dam waste of soil."

The wandering greenish-grey eyes had rested for a moment on the puffy contemptuous face a few inches beneath them without the faintest symptom of intelligence. Empty eyes, yet with a hint of danger in them, like a bright green pool of water in a derelict quarry. "You shall have a basket of the fruit; if you'll risk it. It never really ripens—queer-looking seeds."

"You eat it yourself, then?"

The eyes slid away, the narrow shoulders had lifted a little. "I take things as they come." It was precisely how he had afterwards taken the cheque.

Seated there, on either side of the deal table, in the bare, uncarpeted, uncurtained living-room of the cottage over a luncheon of bread and dry cheese and onions, with the reflected light of the tree on his half-brother's face, the talk between the two of them had gradually degenerated into an altercation.

At length the Fruit Merchant, with some little relief, had completely lost his temper. A half empty jam-pot buzzing with bees was no more appetising an object because the insects were not of the usual variety. He had literally been stung into repeating a few semi-fraternal truths.

To submit to being half-starved simply because nobody with money to waste would so much as look at your bits of drawings; to sit there dreamily grinning at a tree in your back-garden, twenty times more useless because there wasn't its like for miles around, even *if* there wasn't; to be content to hang like a blood-sucker on the generosity of a relative half-blood and half-water—well, he had given P. P. a bit of his mind.

The Fruit Merchant instinctively drew a cold fat hand down his face as a more and more precise recollection of the subsequent scene recurred to him. Mere silence can be insulting, and there was one thing about his half-brother—worse than all the rest of his peculiarities put together—that had never failed to reduce him to a feverish helplessness: his eyes. They didn't see you even when they were fixed on you across a couple of feet of deal board. They saw something else; and with no vestige of common courtesy.

And those hands—you could swear at a glance that they had never done a single honest day's work in their owner's lifetime. Every sight of them had made it easier for the Fruit Merchant to work himself up into a blind refreshing rage. The cottage had fairly shaken to his abuse. The raw onions had danced under his fist on the table. And twining in and out between his roarings and shoutings had meandered on that other low, groping, dispassionate voice—his brother's.

He had found his own place; and there he intended to remain. Rather than sit on a stool in a counting-house writing invoices for crates of oranges and pineapples he would hang himself from the topmost branches of the tree. You had your own life to lead, and it didn't matter if you died of it. He was not making any claims. There was nothing the same in this world for any two individuals. And the more different everything was, the more closely you should cling to the difference.

Oh, yes, he had gone on, it was mere chance, or whatever you liked to call it, that had brought him here; a mere chance that the tree had not even been charged for in the rent. There it was, and it would last him his lifetime; and, when that was over, he wouldn't complain. He had wagged his skimpy beard, a pencil

between his fingers. No, he wouldn't complain if they just dug a hole in the garden and shovelled his body in under the grass within reach of the rootlets. What's your body?—"They'll buy me all right when I'm safely dead. Try it—it's a fair speculation."

"Try what?" The Fruit Merchant's countenance had suddenly set like a gargoyle in cast-iron.

His half-brother had nodded towards a dingy portfolio that stood leaning against a half-empty bookcase. And at that his guest had laid about him with a will. "So that's the kind of profit you are hoping to make out of your blighted old bee-bush? That's your profit? *That's* your fine airs—your miserable scribblings and scragglings."

He had once more slammed down his fat fist on the table and delivered his ultimatum. "See here, I give you a hundred pounds, here and now. There's no claim on me, not a shred. We don't even share the same mother, even if we share the same dad. You talk this abject rubbish to me. You have never earned a decent penny in your life. You never will. You are a fool and a loafer. Go to the Parish; and go for good. I'm sick of it, d'ye hear?—sick of it. You sit there, whiffling that I haven't eyes in my head, that I don't know black from white, that you'd rather hang your miserable carcase in your wretched old tree than take a respectable job. Well, hang it there—it won't break the branches if this is the only kind of meal you can give a visitor! I'm done with you. I wash my hands of you. Do you hear?"

He had—inaccurately—pantomimed the operation, sweeping over the jam-pot as he did so, and now drew in his breath—a cold breath, too; as, with eyes fixed on the ever-lightening hedgerows beyond his oblong window, he remembered the renewed red-hot stab of pain that had transfixed the ball of his thumb.

It recalled him instantaneously to his surroundings. Scrambling up from his seat he ejected his head out of the cab into the open. "Whoa, there! Whoa, I say; I'm getting out."

The horse was dragged up on to its haunches, the cab came to a standstill, and, to the roaring suspirations of the animal, the Fruit Merchant alighted on the tinkling ice of a frozen wayside puddle of water. He turned himself about. Time and the night had not tarried during his journey. The east was a blaze of moonlight. The moon glared in the grey heavens like a circular flat little window of glass.

"Wait here"—the Fruit Merchant bade his cabman in the desolation. "You've pretty near shaken the head off my body."

The cabman ducked his own small head in reply, and saluted his fare with a jerk of his whip. "You won't be long," he sang out between his whiskers.

"What did he mean by that?" was the Fruit Merchant's querulous question to himself as he mounted the few remaining yards of by-lane towards the crest of the slope. He was tired and elderly and cold. A pathetic look, one almost of sadness, came into his face. He pushed up his muffler and coughed. There replied the faintest echo from the low copse that bordered the lane. Grass, crystalled with hoar-frost, muffled his footsteps. What had he meant by that? repeated self to self, but not as if expectant of an answer.

When well out of sight of the cabman and his vehicle beneath the slope of the hill, the Fruit Merchant paused and lifted his eyes. League beyond league beneath him, as if to the confines of the world, the countryside spread on—frost-beclad meadow, wood and winding lane. And one sole house in sight, a small, tumbledown, lightless, huddling cottage, its ragged thatch and walls chequered black with shadow and dazzling white with wash of moonshine. And there—lifting itself into the empty skies, its twigs and branches sweeping the stars, stood, as if in wait for him, the single naked gigantic tree.

The Fruit Merchant gazed across at it, like an obese minute Belial on the ramparts of Eden. He had been fooled, then; tricked. He might have guessed the fatuity of his enterprise. He *had* guessed it. The house was empty; the bird had flown. Why for a single instant had he dreamed otherwise? Simply because all these years he had been deceived into believing there was a kind of honesty in the fellow. Just that something quixotic, stupid, stubborn, dense, dull, demented which—nothing but lies, then.

That bee in his bonnet, that snake in his grass: nothing but lies. There was no principle by which you could judge a man like that; and yet—well, after all, he was like anybody else. Give him a taste of the sweets of success, and his boasted solitude, his contempt for the mere decencies of life, his pretended disgust of men more capable and square-headed than himself had vanished into thin air. There were fools in the world, he had now discovered, who would pay ninety-seven guineas for a second or third hand scrabble of a drawing. "Right you are; hand over the dibs, and I am off!"

A scornful yet lugubrious smile stole over the Fruit Merchant's purplish features. He would be honest about it; he positively en-

joyed acknowledging when a rival had bested him over a bargain. He would even agree that he had always nursed his own little superstitions. And now all that fine silly talk—sheer fudge. He had been himself childish fool enough to be impressed by it; yes, and to have been even a little frightened by—a tree.

He eyed it there—that gaunt, prodigious weed; and then, with one furtive glance over his round shoulder towards the crest of the slope behind which lay his way of escape from this wintry landscape and from every memory of the buffoon who had cheated him, he slowly descended the hill, pushed open the broken gate, and entered the icy untended garden.

Once more he came to a standstill in his frieze coat, and from under the brim of his hard hat stared up into the huge frigid branches. There is a supple lift and ease in the twigs of a tree asleep in winter. Green living buds are everywhere huddling close in their drowsy defences. Even the Fruit Merchant could distinguish between the dreaming and the dead, or, at any rate, between the unripe and the rotten.

And as he looked, two thoughts scurried like rats out of the wainscot of his mind. An unprecedented foreboding descended on him. These lean shrunken twigs, these massive vegetable bones—the tree was dead. And up there—he shifted rapidly to and fro in order to secure an uninterrupted view of a kind of huddling shape up aloft there, an object that appeared to be stooping crazily forward as if on a similar quest in respect to himself.

But, no. He took a deep breath. The muffled knocking against the wall of his head ceased. He need not have alarmed himself: an optical illusion. Nothing.

The tree *was* dead. That was clear—a gaunt, black sapless nightmare. But the ungainly clump and shape, hoisted midway among its boughs was not a huddling human body. It was only yet another kind of derelict parasite—withered mistletoe. And that gentle spellican-like rattling high overhead was but the fingering of a faint breeze in the moonlight; clacking twig against twig.

Maybe it would have simplified matters if—— But no need to dwell on that. One corpse at a time was enough for any man on a night like this and in a country as cheerless as the plains of Gomorrah. A phrase or two out of his familiar bills of lading recurred to the Fruit Merchant's mind—"the act of God." There was something so horrific in the contorted set of the branches

outthrust in ungainly menace above his head that he was reminded of no less a depravity than the devil himself. Thank the Lord, his half-brother had *not* remembered to send him a parcel of the fruit.

If ever poison showed in a plant, it haunted every knot and knuckle of this tree. Judgment had overtaken it—the act of God. That's what came of boasting. That's what came of idling a useless life away in a daydream at other people's expense. And now the cunning bird was flown. The insult of his half-brother's triumph stabbed the Fruit Merchant like a sword.

A sudden giddiness, the roar as of water, caused in part no doubt by the posture of his head, again swept over him, reverberated in his ears. He thrust a cautious hand into the breast of his coat and lowered his eyes. They came to a stay on the rugged moonlit bole. And there, with a renewed intensity of gaze, they once more fixed themselves.

The natural living bark of the tree had been of a russet grey, resembling that of the beech. Apart from a peculiar shimmeringness due to the frost that crystalled it over, and as the skin of a dead thing, that bark now suggested the silveriness of leprosy. So far, so good. But midway up the unbranched bole, at the height of five to six feet from the ground, appeared a wide peculiar cicatrice. The iridescent greyness here abruptly ended. Above it stretched a clear blank ring of darker colour, knobbed over, in and out, with tiny sparkling clusters of fungi.

The Fruit Merchant stole in a pace or two. No feat of the inhuman this. Cleanly and precisely the thick rind of the tree must some time since have been cut and pared away in a wide equal ring; a ring too far from the ground to have been the work of pigs or goats, too smooth and sharp-edged to have been caused by the gnawings of cattle. It was perfectly plain; the sap-protecting skin of the thing had been deliberately cut and hacked away. The tree had been murdered. High in the moonlit heavens it gloated there: a victim.

Not until then did the Fruit Merchant stealthily turn and once more survey his half-brother's house. The slow and almost furtive movement of his head and shoulders suggested that the action was involuntary. From this garden side the aspect of the hovel was even more abject and disconsolate. Its one ivy-clustered chimney-stack was smokeless. The moonbeams rained softly and mercilessly on the flint walls, the boarded windows, the rat-and-bird-ravaged thatch.

Only a spectre could be content with such a dwelling, and a guilt-stricken wretch at that. Yet without any doubt in the world the house was still inhabited. For even now a slender amber beam of light leaned out at an obtuse angle from some crevice in the shuttering wood into the vast bath of moonshine.

For a moment the Fruit Merchant hesitated. He could leave the garden and regain his cab without nearing the house. He could yet once more "wash his hands." Certainly, after sight of the maniac's treacherous work on his unique God-given tree he hadn't the faintest vestige of a desire to confront his half-brother. Quite the reverse. He would far rather fling a second hundred pounds after the first than be once more contaminated by his company. There was something vile in his surroundings.

In shadows black as pitch, like these, any inconceivably evil creature might lie in covert. If the tree alive could decoy an alien fauna to its succulent nectar, the tree dead might well invite even less pleasing ministrations. Come what come would, he was prepared. It might startle him; but he was dead-cold already; and when your whole mind is filled with disgust and disquiet there is no room for physical fear. You merely want to shake yourself free —edge out and be off.

Nevertheless, the human intruder in this inhuman wilderness was already, and with infinite caution, making his way towards the house. On a pitch-black night he might have hesitated. Hadn't venomous serpents the habit of stealing for their winter slumber into the crannies and hollows of fallen wood? Might not even the lightest northern zephyr bring down upon his head another vast baulk of timber from the withered labyrinth above? But so bright was the earth's lanthorn, so still the starry sky, that he could hear and even see the seeds from the humbler winter weeds scattering out from their yawning pods, as, with exquisite care, he brushed on through the tangling growths around him.

And having at length closely approached the walls, standing actually within a jutting shadow, he paused yet again and took a deep breath into his body before, gently lifting himself, he set his eye to the crevice from which poured out that slender shaft of light.

So artificially brilliant was the room within—by comparison with the full moonlight of the Fruit Merchant's natural world without—that for an instant or two he saw nothing. But he persevered, and after a while his round protruding eye found itself master of at least half the space on the other side of the shutters.

Stilled through and through, his fingers clutching the frosted sill, he stood there half suspended on his toes, and as if hypnotised.

For scarcely more than a yard distant from his own there stooped a face—his half-brother's: a face to haunt you to your dying day. It was surmounted by a kind of nightcap, and was almost unrecognisable. The unfolding of the hours of twelve solitary years had played havoc with the once-familiar features. The projecting brows above the angular cheek-bones resembled polished stone. The ears stood out like the vans of a bat on either side above the corded neck. The thin unkempt beard on the narrow jaw brushed the long gnarled hand that was moving with an infinite tedious care on the bare table beneath it.

Motionlessly the hanging paraffin-lamp poured its radiance upon this engrossed cadaverous visage, revealing every line and bone, hollow and wrinkle.

Nevertheless its possessor, this old man, shrunken and hideous in his frame of abject poverty, his arms drawn close up to his fallen body, worked sedulously on and on. And behind and around him showed the fruit of his labours. Pinned to the scaling walls propped on the ramshackle shelf above his fireless hearthstone, and even against the stale remnant of a loaf of bread on the cracked blue dish beside him, was a litter of pictures. And everywhere, lovely and marvellous in all its guises—the tree. The tree in May's showering loveliness, in summer's quiet wonder, in autumn's decline, in naked slumbering wintry grace. The colours glowed from the fine old rough paper like lamps and gems.

There were drawings of birds too, birds of dazzling plumage, of flowers and butterflies, their crimson and emerald rose and saffron seemingly shimmering and astir; their every mealy and feathery and pollened boss and petal and plume on fire with hoarded life and beauty. And there a viper with its sinuous molten scales; and there a face and a shape looking out of its nothingness such as would awake even a dreamer in a dream.

Only three sounds in that night-quiet, and these scarcely discernible, stirred in the watcher's ear: the faint shrill sing-song of the flame of the lamp, the harsh wheezy breath of the artist, and a faint scuttling as of rats or mice. This austere and dying creature must have come in at last from the world of nature and mankind a long time ago. The arm that had given the tree its quietus had now not the strength to lift an axe. Yet the ungainly fingers toiled assiduously on.

The Fruit Merchant, spying in on the old half-starved being that sat there, burning swiftly away among his insane gewgaws, as nearly broke out crying as laughing. He was frightened and elated; mute and bursting with words. The act of God! Rather than even remotely resemble that old scarecrow in his second childhood pushing that tiny-bladed knife across the surface of a flat of wood, he would——. An empty and desolate look stole into the gazing eye.

Not that he professed to understand. He knew nothing. His head was completely empty. The last shred of rage and vindictiveness had vanished away. He was glad he had come, for now he was going back. What little of the present and future remained would soon be the past. He, too, was ageing. *His* life also was coming to an end. He stared on—oh, yes. And not even a nephew to inherit his snug fat little fortune. Worldly goods, shipload on shipload—well, since he could not take them away with him, he would leave them behind. He would bequeath them to charity, to the W.F.M.P.A. perhaps; and he would make a note of the hundred pounds.

Not a malice; only to leave things business-like and in order; to do your duty by a greedy and ungrateful world even though you were soon to be washing your hands of that, too. All waste, nothing but waste. But he thanked the Lord he had kept his sanity, that he was respected; that he wasn't in the artificial fruit trade—the stuff your grandmother belled under glass. He thanked the Lord he wasn't foul to look at; foul probably to smell; and a poison even to think about.

Yet still he peeped on—this old Tom, though at no Lady Godiva. "They" would buy right enough—there was no doubt of that. Christie's would some day be humming with the things. He didn't deny the old lunatic that. He knew a bird when he saw it —even on paper. Ninety-seven guineas: at that rate there was more money swimming about in this pestilent hovel than ever even he himself could lay his practised hands on.

And there were fools in plenty—rich, dabbling, affected, silly fools—dillytanties, you called 'em—who would never know that their lying, preposterous P. P. had destroyed the very life of the tree that had given its all for him. And why? And why? The Fruit Merchant was almost tempted to burn down the miserable cabin over his half-brother's head. Who could tell? . . . A gust of wind stirred in the bedraggled thatch, feebly whined in the keyhole.

And at that moment, as if an angry and helpless thought could make itself audible even above the hungry racketing of mice and the melancholic whistling of a paraffin-lamp—at that moment the corpse-like countenance, almost within finger-touch on the other side of the table, slowly raised itself from the labour of its regard, and appeared to be searching through the shutter's cranny as if into the Fruit Merchant's brain. The glance swept through him like an avalanche. No, no. But one instantaneous confrontation, and he had pushed himself back from the impious walls as softly as an immense sack of hay.

These were not eyes—in that abominable countenance. Speck-pupilled, greenish-grey, unfocused, under their protuberant mat of eyebrow, they remained still as a salt and stagnant sea. And in their uplifted depths, stretching out into endless distances, the Fruit Merchant had seen regions of a country whence neither for love nor money he could ever harvest one fruit, one pip, one cankered bud. And blossoming there beside a glassy stream in the mid-distance of far-mountained sward—a tree. . . .

In after years an old, fat, vulgar, and bronchitic figure, muffled up in a pathetic shawl, would sometimes be seen seated in a place of honour, its hard square hat upon its thick bald skull, within positive reach of the jovial auctioneer's ivory hammer. To purchase every "P. P." that came into the market was a dream beyond even a multi-millionaire's avarice. But small beetles or grubs or single feathers drawn "from the life" were within scope of the Fruit Merchant's purse. The eye that showed not the faintest vestige of reflected glory from the orange of the orange, the gamboge of the lemon, or the russet bronze of the pomegranate—in their crated myriads—would fitfully light up awhile as one by one, and with reiterated grunts of satisfaction, he afterwards in the secrecy of his home consigned these indifferent and "early" works of art to the flames.

But since his medical man has warned him that any manifestation of passion would almost unquestionably prove his ultimate manifestation of anything, he steadily avoided thinking of the tree. Yet there it remained, unexorcisable, ineradicable, in his fading imagination.

Indeed, he finally expired in the small hours one black winter's morning, and as peacefully as a child, having dreamed that he was looking through a crevice into what could not be hell, but might be limbo or purgatory, the place of departed spirits. For there sat his half-brother, quite, quite still. And all around him,

to be seen, haunted gay and painted birds and crystal flowers and damasked butterflies; and, as it were, sylphs and salamanders, shapes of an unearthly beauty. And all of them strangely, preternaturally still, as if in a peepshow, as if stuffed.

Ford Madox Ford

RIESENBERG

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A feeling of desolation seemed for Philip Hands to overhang the little German bathing-establishment. The rain dripped down among the all enveloping fir trees; the heavy mists hung all above the deep valley. Geheimer Sanitätsrath Dr. von Salzer with his long flaked beard, his bent back, his scurrying gait and his peering, spectacled eyes, that seemed always to be spying out invisible mice or spiders in unseen corners—the incredible nerve-doctor whom Philip Hands did not know whether to venerate or to desire to kick—had just scuttled for all the world like a large goat over the further edge of the little white Platz and had vanished round the corner into the door of the room occupied by Philip Hands' mother. And Dr. von Salzer's visits to his mother always intensely exasperated Philip. It was like giving over that beloved and tortured lady into the hands of an inscrutable spider. It might be a benevolent spider; it might be a wicked and hateful charlatan. There was not any means of knowing. But at any rate, for the moment everything was disgusting.

You could not make anything out of this beastly foreign place, half of whose inmates at least were miserable creatures tottering on the verge of insanity and ministered to by the other half who might be like Philip Hands himself, devoted children, or paid attendants whose business in life it was to look cheerful, to dress well, to dance to the band and to play skittles. And indeed normally they kept it up very well in Drieselheim. It was probably—and even in his black mood Philip had to acknowledge it—made up of about the best people you could find in the whole of Europe. For all you had to allow that it is just the best people of Europe, the oldest of families, who provide the greatest propor-

tion of haunted persons with odd mental skeletons in the shadowy cupboards of their minds. And indeed that autumn, which was the first autumn after the Boxer risings and the attack on the Legations in China, found them nearly all almost a family party —a sort of diplomatic clan in Bad-Drieselheim which was the private property of the Grand Duke of Trevers. For just as the soldiers of the several nations of Europe had fought side by side in the march to Pekin, so the sufferers from mental horrors—a crop of whom always survive the horrors of widespread bloodshed—were gathered together here to be cured of their troubles or to drop out of life in one asylum or another. It was because Philip Hands' mother had seen his father die with an arrow through his throat and had suffered from hallucinations that she knew to be hallucinations, it was because of this that she and her son were there, just as it was because Annette von Droste's father had seen her younger sister sicken and die within the enclosures that Annette von Droste was there waiting hand and foot upon the erect and benevolent old man who would tell you anecdotes of all the kingly personages of Europe and would yet sometimes pass both hands down his face as if he were trying to brush away drops of blood. The von Drostes and the Hands had been in Pekin at that time together. So had the Rodes, the Kesselheims, the Lussacs and three or four of the other families, that were there in the little Bath. And they were all families that had rubbed shoulders together all over the world in Legations and Embassies. They might meet at Madrid one year, in St. Petersburg the next; one of them might be His Majesty's envoy at Bangkok and be met on the steamer by another family going out to represent His Very Christian Majesty of Portugal at the Court of Tokyo. But Bad-Drieselheim as a rule was so enormously expensive that the mere diplomatic service would not ordinarily have been able to get their pockets to run to it. They wouldn't have been there at all, they would have been scattered over Switzerland from Interlaken to Salso-Maggiore, if it had not been that the Grand Duke of Treves had lost his favourite son in Pekin too. Ordinarily, Bad-Drieselheim was a place where princes of foreign houses retired to get cured of their megrims. Now Philip Hands' mother and the von Drostes and the Rodes and the Kesselheims and the Lussacs were there because the bereaved Grand Duke had extended to them an invitation that made them practically his guests.

And for the life of him, Philip Hands could not see what attrac-

tions Drieselheim could offer to royal and Imperial Princes. The Bath itself was an old and abandoned convent, set down on an embankment that was like a dam across a solitary valley, an immense steep valley covered to the very tips of the ranges with melancholy and weeping firs. Up the valley they were never allowed to go. Upon coming there they were made to give their words that they would not. The official reason given by Dr. von Salzer was that the valley contained quarries where blasting was very frequent, and that in consequence his patients might be crushed by falls of rock. For himself, Philip Hands cared very little for this mystery, though he did not in the least believe Dr. von Salzer's explanation. He was inclined to believe with everyone in Bad-Drieselheim that the Grand Duke's Government had there a secret depot for testing new patterns of field guns and high explosives. At any rate, it was none of Philip Hands' business, as a gentleman, who had passed his word, to attempt to interfere with the quarries or the secret, whatever it was.

Annette von Droste, however, took it differently. She was convinced that the mad uncle and predecessor of the Grand Duke of Treves was hidden somewhere in that deep valley, and the thought of this mysterious and eminent person with his romantic career and his absolute disappearance twelve years before, filled Annette with an enthusiastic curiosity, that was the only one of her enthusiasms that Mr. Hands had not been able to share. He had shared almost all her other fancies for as long as he could remember, from the time when he had been fourteen and she eleven in St. Petersburg, or when he had been eighteen and she fifteen in Paris or during the season before last in London—till half-past nine of the night before when she had, with an unaccountable strangeness in her manner, very definitely refused to marry him. That had been the night before.

He had proposed to her about four o'clock. They had been drinking coffee and eating sweet chocolate biscuits made to resemble true-love knots, while all the invalids were taking their afternoon sleeps. She had not said no; she had not said yes; she had been quite gay. She had gone away into the woods as she said, laughing, to talk it over with the mad ex-Duke in the forbidden valley. And Philip Hands had remained to drink more coffee and eat more chocolate biscuits in the autumn sunshine at the little table in the Platz near the bandstand. The band did not play till five o'clock because till that hour all the invalids rested. But upon the stroke, it struck up the solemn Chorale with which

it habitually got all the patients out of bed. Philip Hands had gone to his mother's room to fetch her for her slow promenade along the gravel walk, in the sunshine of the lower valley. Here they had been joined by old von Droste who, having heard from Philip that his daughter had gone for a walk in the woods, proceeded to tell them the true story of what the Crown Prince of Wallachia had actually done at Tiplitz. The sun had shone; Philip's mother had seemed much better; the eminent and venerable diplomat had been so more than usually cordial that Philip had thought he was beginning to understand something of what was attractive in a place even as dull as Drieselheim.

They dined, as the custom of the place was, each patient in his own room, accompanied by his attendant. Afterwards, for an hour, the attendant was supposed to read the daily papers to his invalid. There there came the night assembly round the bandstand, which was illuminated with small strings of lamps, whilst those who cared for dancing were provided with a small orchestra of their own in the large and ghostly hall that had formerly served the nuns as a refectory.

Philip Hands had not found Annette among the dancers, so he went to look for her on the terrace which was erected, as it were, on a high rampart before the frowning round archway of the old white convent. The moon was high in the South, the valley opened out wide and far below his feet. The black woodlands, all of stiff pines, came down on each side of the terrace. It was very still; it was a warm autumn evening and Philip Hands felt confident that very soon Annette would come to find him. He leant upon the parapet and gazed into the spaces of the moonlight. He was twenty-seven—he was second attaché at a first class embassy; he knew he could have the governorship of the Leeward Islands for the asking and he hadn't the least doubt that Annette loved him.

It was very still for a time, and then they began blasting again in the forbidden valley. Philip Hands could hear the familiar but mysterious screams, like human voices of enormous power, heard at a great distance. That, of course, he thought, must be the high explosive. That sort of thing gave off the most extraordinary noises. He remembered to have heard that the explosion of Gelsonite gave an overtone thirteen eighths above its first note, very like the sort of screaming sound that fills the air when great bells are played. They must therefore be using some very high explosive indeed in the forbidden valley. That did away with any

idea of quarrying, if they quarried with a high explosive in at all the quantity in which they must obviously be using it to-night, they would blow all the mountains from Drieselheim into the Mosel within two or three hours. So that it was pretty obvious what *was* going on there. It could not be anything else but the most intensely secret of military operations.

The noises died away again; it became all of a deathly stillness in the valley; only the thin sound of the violins thrilled through the thick wall from the nuns' refectory where they were dancing, and suddenly Philip Hands heard a crackling in the deep woods —footsteps and the splitting of the small dry lateral twigs of the high firs. In the deep blackness his eyes perceived the bluish and as if phosphorescent gleam of a white dress. It came down in the darkness, it reached the terrace; it was Annette coming to him out of the woods.

"Have you been there all this time?" he asked.

She came towards him silently, her hands were stretched out, not as if it were towards him, but as though she were in the darkness feeling her way towards the light.

. . . . . .

She had refused him! She had refused him then and there on the terrace in the moonlight. She had not given him any reason, she had said that there was absolutely no reason to give. None at all. She said only that she could not marry; that she was not fit to marry. That had been the night before!

Philip Hands had been possibly rather complacent, sure of an easy conquest. But he had an amount of emotion during the night that was sufficient to denote a very violent passion. He passed the dark hours in pacing up and down his small room, swearing violently. The whole thing was inexplicable and it was insulting. The girl, gay, high spirited, raven-haired and flushed, had listened to his proposals and had gone off into the woods to meditate on them. Philip Hands hadn't had the slightest doubt that she had gone into those deep woods to sing the song whose first line runs, *"Er der herrlichste von allen"*—words which mean "He the most noble of all!" and a song which the correct German maiden is supposed to sing upon being proposed to by a man who is the noblest work of God. Young Mr. Hands was not German enough exactly to put these thoughts into words. Indeed he was too Anglo-Saxon to put any thoughts into words at all. He had just waited, happy in the sunlight. A pleasant young man, with

a pleasant career opening before him, the only danger which his parents or friends could have imagined would overhang him would be that he was so obviously going to marry a dark, passionate, romantically unreasonable young girl who might give him the very deuce of a time.

So that Annette's inexplicable refusal struck Mr. Hands as being not only unreasonable but sharply insulting. She had gone into the wood tidy, with a swinging step, her black hair carefully braided round her head, in a flimsy white dress. She had come out beneath the moon tottering, pallid, her dress torn, and green with the green of tree-trunks, whilst her hair was disordered and furry, a pine twig caught in it falling across her temples, and wetted so that it gleamed in the moonlight. And she had refused Mr. Hands!

Mr. Hands could not imagine that during her several hours of reflection she had discovered that he was unworthy of her. She had known him for too long, and he was not unworthy of her. Similarly, she was not unworthy of him. Their families and fortunes were remarkably well matched! Then it must have been some damned thing that had happened in the damned woods of this ridiculous and damned Grand Duchy. That was all Philip Hands could make of it, in his outraged pride.

He supposed Annette must have gone up the forbidden valley and had seen or heard—what the devil had she seen or heard? What the devil had happened to her? Mr. Hands' mind being distinctly concrete, he could think of nothing but the precautions that the Government of the Grand Duchy would take to conceal its secret armaments, its newly invented firearms or its high explosives. But what silly precautions could the rotten Government of an absurd Grand Duchy take? that, supposing she had poked her inquisitive nose into their secrets, could prevent a young lady of good family and excellent prospects from marrying a gentleman of the Diplomatic Corps in every way her equal?

Towards morning, while he paced and fumed, absurd ideas began to get into his mind. Perhaps his Annette, in the forbidden valley, had come upon the mad Grand Duke, that legendary figure of Treves, who had disappeared twenty years before. She must have come upon the mad Grand Duke and have been married to him by force. God knows what! And with his mind fatigued and full of grotesque images, Mr. Philip Hands thought he must be going mad. Annette von Droste must have gone mad. They were in that place, a great old convent building that was

full of mad people. For there was no denying that the patients were all mad. They heard voices; they saw shapes; they were troubled by unseen hands, brushed by invisible wings, and in those ghostly cells and corridors, the pressure was too much for the sane people that were with them. This whole place represented a horrible and ghostly manufactory of lunatics, with Dr. von Salzer a spider-like lunatic at the head of them all. And in the darkness the whole ghastly conventual building, of which he occupied an old nun's cell in the far east corner of the inner courtyard, seemed to whisper and gibber with the brushings of the dresses of long dead nuns. Annette must have gone mad. He himself must be going mad. . . .

In the grey of the morning, Philip Hands heard the hoofs of horses strike hard and clattering on the cobbles of that small inner courtyard. He strode to the window and fell back with an oath of horror that seemed to be shaken out of the very pit of his stomach. He grasped at both his eyes with the palms of his hands. In the dim white small courtyard stood two grotesque shapes, two indescribable, ghostly, black simulacra of horses. Black trappings covered them from their heads right down to the ground, so that they resembled the sable ghosts of chargers upon which medieval knights must have ridden, whilst from socketless eyeholes they appeared to shed hollow, forbidding, and unspeakably mournful glances. They seemed to be the apparitions of horses that had been dead five hundred years, and for the moment Philip Hands' whole brain seemed to be turning round inside his head. What was he looking at? There was no knowing what didn't survive, what mightn't survive in this extraordinary, old-fashioned Grand Duchy. It was one half modern quick-firing guns of deadly precision and the other half peasants in three cornered hats, short jackets, knee-breeches and stockings with ribands at the knee, practising the most old-fashioned ceremonials, gifted as they were said to be, all of them, with second sight, and perceiving daily in their thick and fantastic woods all the hob-goblins of Grimm, the spectres of the Brocken and the ghostly charcoal burners of the Harz mountains. There was no knowing what old, forgotten horrors, what dim fragments of the spectral past might not here survive along with the high explosives of the forbidden valley. In Central Africa, as he had read that morning, in a deep lake, they had discovered, still surviving, a monstrous prehistoric lizard that was said to be a survival of the first slime of the world—a monstrous scaled animal like a

winged tortoise, as large as a town hall, and with jaws as deep as a cathedral portal. And this absurd forgotten country was as little explored as Central Africa. Why, the peasants still sacrificed mares and buried them beneath the corner posts of their houses, as they had done in the pagan days of Odin, thousands of years before the birth of Christ.

. . . . . .

Altogether, Mr. Philip Hands passed a very bad night of it—a night of which not even his morning bath could altogether wash out the traces. Of course, upon taking a second view of the horses, he had perceived behind them an elaborate, ebony, gilded and glazed structure, and shortly afterwards four men in their shirt-sleeves carrying down a coffin of polished brass, with bright steel handles. And he had realised that they were merely carrying away to an early train, for trans-shipment to Berlin, where the funeral was to take place in the Hedwigskirche, the body of Hofrath von Kellermann who had died, according to the official bulletin, of lesion of the brain the day before. But even that, though it was commonplace, was disagreeable. For, in spite of the discreet official silence and the removal of the body in early hours of the morning, the rumour ran among the assistants and servants of the place that the body of the Hofrath had been horribly mangled and crushed out of all human semblance. He was supposed, in fact, to have escaped from his attendants and, wandering into the forbidden valley, to have been crushed by one of the huge rocks that hurtled through space from the blastings in the forgotten fir woods.

Whilst Philip Hands sat in the large courtyard in the rain beneath the awning of the bandstand, waiting in the drip and depression of it all for the Sanitätsrath to come from his mother's room, a new and equally horrible surmise crossed his mind. Supposing that Annette, wandering too, into the deep woods, had been crushed by such a fall of rock, or had even witnessed the death of that unfortunate man? And the thought of this was so much more than he could bear, that he got up and began to pace up and down amongst the wet tables and chairs beneath the dripping awning. From the distant fir woods to right and to left the mysterious sounds of the quarries in the Driesel called from time to time like immense, rustling, human voices.

And suddenly, Mr. Hands perceived Annette von Droste in her

white dress, half covered in a brown mackintosh. She came out of the door of her father's rooms on the opposite side of the courtyard, and made for the small nun's postern that gave on to the deep woods.

Philip followed her over the wet gravel of the Platz. He soon checked himself, but he could not have told you exactly why. Yesterday, perhaps he would have followed her without hesitation; to-day he was a rejected suitor! And yet he could not but feel, he had an irresistible impulse to believe, that in her white dress and brown mackintosh she was going into danger. The idea, indeed, came to him that she was going to meet the mad Grand Duke!

Suddenly, round the corner that led to his mother's room, there came, with an odd air of its being a procession, Dr. von Salzer, with his long, foamlike beard, and Philip Hands' little, old, and much loved, mother. Behind them followed Dr. Salzer's assistant, a short-sighted blond young man with a face like a bun, and large gold spectacles. He was called Schultz, and he was pushing before him a light bath-chair with spider wheels and rubber tyres. It was usual at this hour for Dr. Salzer to approach Philip, and to give him encouraging news of his mother's progress. To-day, therefore, Philip hurried towards them. The rain had ceased, though heavy drops fell from all the gutters, and the noises no longer came from the forbidden valley.

Philip's mother was a little old woman, very bent with age, but with a quaint manner that was half dictatorial and half humourous. Her eyes always twinkled; her cheeks were of the texture of a red and shrivelled apple and she spoke always with a very clear and fluting intonation, turning her head a little on one side, like a bird that surveys you from its perch. But for all her quaint precision and her air of tranquil widowhood, Philip Hands was aware that this most sane of creatures heard voices and saw appalling visions of demons that resembled the images of Buddhist temples. She had heard and seen them ever since his father had been murdered beneath her eyes in China.

"Tell Dr. von Salzer," she cried, before Philip had reached them, "that I am perfectly capable of walking two and a half miles. I do not need this grotesque machine to follow behind me."

The Sanitätsrath combed his long beard with three fingers, and holding its ends together, looked with a long glance at Philip Hands. "Ah!" he said. "Yes." He spoke very slowly, but with a sort of lisp. "But this is a very special duty, this is a very special

test. This is, if you will be pleased to let me call it so, the great test of the cure that I make."

"Nevertheless," the little old woman piped out, "I am perfectly able to walk two and a half miles."

"Ah, gracious lady," the doctor said, and he surveyed her a long time and enigmatically. "But will you be able to walk back, that is the question?"

"If I am not able to walk back," she replied, "I shan't be worth carrying back upon a velocipede."

The Sanitätsrath slowly shrugged his shoulders up to his ears, and as slowly let them fall. He glanced at her and then quickly at her son.

"But it is I that must take the responsibility," he said, "and I prefer not to take it."

"Then, if I am to faint or do anything unseemly," Mrs. Hands exclaimed in English, "I am not going to have this young man with the spectacles observing me in disorder."

The Sanitätsrath bowed his back so that his beard appeared to be about to sweep the ground.

"Gracious lady," he said, "it was my intention from the first to wheel you back myself, for I do not permit even my excellent colleague Schultz to penetrate into the arcana of my mysteries. Besides," he added, "it is very dangerous."

"If there is any danger for my mother——" Philip Hands exclaimed.

"Very excellent Mr. Second Secretary of Legation," the Sanitätsrath said, very softly, "it is impossible that there should be no danger. In all the things of this life there is danger, and living itself is a dangerous operation. But it is equally impossible that you should accompany us."

Philip's mother's cheek balls were of a flush that indicated very much of inward excitement.

"It's quite impossible that you should come with me," she said to her son. "It's kill or cure, as they used to say with the Kildarragh hounds, and it's not I that am going to cumber the ground."

"Oh, it will be cure, it will be cure," the Sanitätsrath lisped softly, and he appeared to push the little old woman gently by the arm across the Platz. They moved away from Philip very slowly, as if they were a shooting party going to execution with the passive and silent Dr. Schultz pushing the bath-chair in the rear for all the world as if he were carrying the coffin in which to bring back a corpse. They were going towards the main archway

of the convent, and Philip Hands suddenly strode off towards the postern gate, through which half an hour before Annette von Droste had disappeared. His mother and the Sanitätsrath refused to allow him to follow them and he was too well disciplined to attempt to disobey their orders. But now he was going to do something.

He was in an extraordinary state of nervous tension. As soon as he was outside the gate, the silence of the deep fir woods closed upon him. The dark branches of the trees brushed against the very walls. From the gate a dark path through the woods led straight to the village of Bortshausen five miles away in an open valley beyond the range. The woods and paths on the right-hand side—those that descended the valley—were all open to the guests of the Bath. But on the left the woods were forbidden ground, for they ascended into the valley behind the convent. On this side every second tree bore a label with the word *Schonung* painted upon it, and the word *Schonung* meant that this was preserved land—as who should say *"Trespassers will be prosecuted."* And it occurred to Mr. Hands at that moment that the ground upon which the convent stood must have been built right across the valley like a dam, a bulwark erected even in the old days when the convent had been first built, to prevent access to the valley itself. This was absurd—for parts of the convent were six hundred years old, and there could not have been at that date any quarries or high explosives. Nevertheless, the thought was oppressive.

It was as if for centuries and centuries the valley with its deep woods had concealed secrets which the nuns and the Church formerly, and now Dr. Salzer and the authorities of the Grand Duchy, desired to keep from the world. Absurd! Yet there the convent was upon its high dam right across the valley, with the fir woods brushing its walls. And at the bottom of the embankment was a tunnel through which the mountain torrents from the valley burst downwards towards the open plains. Thus, upon the one side of the buildings it was all light and openness, for they stood very high; to the rear it was all silence, darkness and deep woods. An ominous and depressing thought—for Philip Hands was certain that it was into these woods that Annette had gone. Placards bearing the words *Schonung* would be sufficient to prevent an army of orderly Germans from penetrating into those woods, but Annette, for all her good old German name, was three parts of a gipsy. She was certainly there. And Philip Hands was so assured of this that he climbed the hill sharply

along the path that led to Bortshausen. Half-way up this he knew, there was a pathway leading to the left before which, upon a tree, there was a placard with the words *"Entrance Absolutely Forbidden. Very Dangerous Path."* Here also, there was a sort of shelter of boughs beneath which there stood always a man in the grey-green uniform of a ducal forester, with a blond bearded face, and a dark green hat decorated with a tuft of feathers. This man's name was Hans Jorgenheim, and Philip knew him very well; he stopped almost every day to chat with him a little about the deer, wild boar, and wild cat, with which the forest abounded.

Philip Hands was going to ask him whether he had seen Annette pass that way, or whether he had heard her going through the woods below, for he knew perfectly well that the forester's keen ears let him know from the cries of disturbed birds whatever passed in the woods immediately beneath his care.

But, even whilst he mounted the steep path, he heard the sound of heavy footsteps descending in a sort of clumsy gallop, as if a frightened beast were coming down the hill. And suddenly there burst upon him Hans Jorgenheim, his honest blue eyes dilated, his mouth open, his face all one great panic.

"Das Fräulein!" he exclaimed, and he caught heavily at a tree trunk to stop his downward career. "Das Fräulein! She has gone up the path amongst the horrible beasts that the Sanitätsrath keeps there."

"And what then, idiot! Dog!" Philip Hands exclaimed. "Why did you not stop her?"

"Could I use physical force? Against an Excellency? A high-born lady? It is unthinkable."

"But, where is she? Why did you not follow her?" Philip Hands shouted.

"That is against discipline," the forester answered. "I have to find the Sanitätsrath and tell him."

"Forester, you are a coward," Philip Hands cried out. "You should have followed the lady, but you were afraid."

The forester let go the tree and drew himself up to his six foot of green and grey.

"Well, yes, I was afraid!" he said. "Very afraid. I have my orders from the Grand Duke. From the Grand Duke himself. Excellency, go you yourself, and if I have the Sanitätsrath's orders I will follow you."

Philip thought quickly.

"The Sanitätsrath," he said, "has gone out with my mother

and a bath chair." For it came into his mind that without doubt the forester would know which way the doctor had gone and would thus get orders from him the more quickly.

"Ah, then," the forester exclaimed, "he has gone there by the lower path." And suddenly he plunged in amongst the trees, crashing his way down behind the rear of the convent in the deep woods.

Philip Hands ran quickly up the steep path. It was a very steep ascent for a man not much in training, and the blood drummed in his ears. By the placard that bore the words "Entrance Absolutely Forbidden," he paused to listen. There was nothing but the silence of the deep woods. There was no brook; there were no birds, even the heavy drip from the trees had ceased with the ceasing of the rain and a heavy mist clung all around him.

He turned into the narrow lateral path. He shuffled along as fast as he could, for he was very much out of breath still with the ascent. The path was very norrow and winding, and, as he got deeper in, the woods appeared infinitely old. The trees were black and twisted with age; ghostly lichen seemed to drip from their extended branches. They towered immensely high, so that their tops whispered unseen amongst the mists. And even as he hurried, Philip Hands was overwhelmed with the sense that he was being watched. He imagined that in all the shadows there were eyes, and from behind the stiff columnar trunks, unknown and forgotten men appeared to peep out at him. The doctor kept horrible beasts in these woods! The forester had said it. At any moment he might come upon them. . . . What might he not come upon? Two or three times he stopped to listen, but always there was the deep silence. The intolerable silence so absolutely solemn and assured, that it was a folly to imagine for your own comfort a sound that did not exist. Suddenly the path divided into two.

One arm went downwards sharply into the huge pines, and huge pines descended as sharply at his right hand without any path. He must be upon the top of the ridge of the valley divided into two. Before him the other arm of the path wound very steeply upwards, between a desolate underwood of brambles and beneath primeval hornbeams. Amongst flakes of shale and slaty rock, it climbed, almost erect, and zigzagging. There was no doubt about the path. There was a footstep in the black mud of a little rill and some bright scarlet toadstools that had formed a circle were broken, scattered, and gleamed white. Annette's

dress had brushed them like that. Annette had gone up that way. He panted up its tortuous steepness.

The bushes gleamed with drops of dew and spiders' webs. In amongst a tangle of brambles he perceived the white skeleton of some beast. From the tusks in the skull it must have been that of a wild boar. Great fragments of rock were crushed all round it. Here and there branches had been ripped from the ancient trees, and white fissures showed down their green-grey trunks. He panted up the very steep and very slippery path. As high as he was, a considerable breeze was blowing and scattered the mist. The trees became thinner like old grey hair. He had glimpses of immense panoramas, of grey mountains, of long marching armies, of black fir woods. He was immensely high—so high up that he could perceive no villages. It was all grey silences and grey heights, and he was highest of them all. He felt himself to be in the highest place in the world, amongst the oldest silences. The path climbed still more steeply and suddenly in a desolate and mournful greyness of sky he came out upon a bare ridge of slate and shale like a hog's back. This ridge descended, with a terrifying, slippery steepness of loose stones, upon each side into an odd, bare valley—each valley like a cup, lined with grey loose slates and thinly clothed with torn and shattered pines. A high ridge; the two desolate valleys—and above all the grey slag!

And forty yards before him, upon a pinnacle of basalt, silent and motionless, like a listening chamois, he perceived Annette von Droste. She gazed down first into one valley and then into another. Then, slowly she put her hands over her eyes. He ran towards her at the end of his breath, hardly keeping his feet upon the slippery and scattering flakes of stone, that seemed hideously set on letting him fall into the cup-like valleys. He would have fallen a hundred feet down into the shattered pines.

He climbed the pinnacle of basalt that went up like a building. Up there the footing was at least firm and flat as if it were a platform. He caught her in his arms. She screamed, a shrill and violent sound like the cry of an eagle, that dissipated itself in the tenuous and desolate air.

"Do not touch me," she cried out. "I am mad. I have gone mad. Do not touch me! Look down! What do you see?"

Philip Hands gazed carelessly upon the mountains that marched in a tremendous procession all round and below them.

"Yes, it is very high here," he said soothingly. "It is much too

high here. It is enough to turn anybody's brain. Why did you come here? Let us go back."

"I am never going back," she answered. "I tell you I am gone mad. There must be madness in our family. It is a very old family. I could not stand the strain of waiting in that place. That is why I can never marry you. That is why I am here. That is why I will never go away from here."

Philip Hands said:

"Oh, come!"

For the moment he could find nothing better to say. And then he pleaded the long agony of his ascent, all the terrible thoughts he had thought. He asked her to remember how faithfully he had followed her; he asked her to look how he had torn his clothes, and at the scratches on his hands.

Whilst he talked, his eyes wandered aimlessly down into one of the valleys, sheer down below their feet. It was a valley, but still it might have been the very top of a mountain—so high it was, like the crater of a very old, a very extinct, a hoary, a cold volcano. . . .

"And after I have followed you so faithfully," he pleaded, desolately, "you are going to throw me over? You can't mean to say you are going to throw me over?"

And then, suddenly, he exclaimed, "My God!" and with an irresistible action, impulsive of protection and of sudden flight, he clutched at her, and:

"The whole mountain's moving!" he cried out.

She looked at him and caught the direction of his eyes. A sudden and incredulous joy appeared to fill her face.

"What do you see?" she called out. "What is it you see?"

"No, no," he said. "Let us get away from here!"

She repeated imperiously, "Tell me what it is you see? Tell me, tell me!"

"What does it matter?" he said fiercely. "The mountain is moving. It looks like a man rolling over. An immense man! But it's the mountain moving. We shall be killed."

She caught him by the wrist and dragged him to the other side of the flat platform of their firm rock. A great screaming sound filled all the upper air, dissipating itself thinly in the immense reaches of space. She pointed.

"What is it you see?" she exclaimed imperiously. "What is it you see there?"

"It's the same thing," he said, "the mountain is moving. The

whole mountain is moving under our feet. The rocks are flying about."

And it appeared to him that an immense rock, as large as his father's house, was thrown hurtling slowly into space far above them, to descend, passing right over their heads at a great height, crashing amongst the trees below.

"But what is it you see?" Annette insisted, until her tone had become an agony to his ears. "What is that thing there? What is it that moves?"

"Oh, it's absurd," he answered.

"In the name of God," she cried out. "What is it? My whole life—my reason depends on this."

He answered unwillingly and shamefaced.

"It's all this fantastic mist. It's a great, an immense man. It's a mountain! It's two mountains! One of them is throwing great rocks into the air. The other is scratching its side. That's what makes the noise. Each time it scratches you hear that screaming. Do you see? There's a deer running out of the wood; it looks smaller than an ant. Have we both gone mad?"

"No, no," she answered. "We are neither of us mad. I see it. You see it. Oh, thank my God, I'm not mad. If I had seen it alone I should have been mad."

And she threw her arms round him, and hid her face upon his shoulder that was wet with the mist.

"But the danger," he said. "We're in great danger. They've thrown another rock! Look!"

"Oh, what does it matter?" she answered passionately. "What does all the danger in the world matter? Don't you understand? I saw this last night. I thought it was all nonsense about there being danger in this valley, and I was looking for the lost Grand Duke. I wanted to look for the Grand Duke and I saw all this! Don't you understand? I thought I was mad!"

On the lower and easier slope, from the edge of the woods that curled up to the ridge, Philip perceived that there had slowly emerged the goat-like form of Dr. von Salzer. He was pushing before him the bath-chair, the ends of his immense beard brushing his laborious hands. Beside him walked Philip Hands' mother, a little, odd figure, in black.

The Sanitätsrath came along very slowly. He was in his shirt sleeves and with his white arms he pointed energetically first down one slope of the ridge, then down the other, and, with his beard flowing out across his chest, he appeared to address long

speeches to Mrs. Hands. Once, when a great rock was passing through the sky he began to run, dragging Mrs. Hands behind him and glancing apprehensively upwards. His motion reminded Philip Hands exactly of the attitudes of people as they ran to take shelter from bomb-fire, he had seen in sieges during the South African war. But the rock, thrown very high, fell far beyond the ridge.

"My God!" Philip Hands exclaimed, "it's hit the other chap on the crown."

The Sanitätsrath and Mrs. Hands were approaching them very slowly so that:

"Gracious lady," his voice came up to them, "if these visions appear as real or seem as unreal as the other visions that you see and if one illusion appears no greater than the other, surely your cure should be completed. For all life is real; or all life is illusions. And who are we to say which are illusions or which are real? When we have such a little bit of life given to us surely it is unworthy of a man or of a woman to trouble about his, or about her illusions! If you hear voices, hear them and there is an end; if you see devils, see them and there is an end of it. Just as if you see and hear these danger zones of mine there is an end of it too. And this is an end of my cure. It is all I can do for you."

He stopped and bowed to the old lady. They were at the very foot of the pinnacle upon which stood Philip Hands and Annette von Droste. And Mrs. Hands walking slowly forward, disappeared right under their feet.

"A bomb-proof shelter," Philip Hands exclaimed, for he recognised that beneath their feet the pinnacle must be hollow towards the west. "A bomb-proof shelter, that's exactly what this place appears to be."

The Sanitätsrath had pushed the bath-chair away in front of him. He stood surveying Philip and Annette looking upwards with an attentive and a bland glance.

"Your two Excellencies," he said mildly, "had better descend. That is not the safest place in the world for tragic explanations."

They found von Salzer and Mrs. Hands in a little alcove that had been carved out of the pinnacle. It was exactly like the summer-houses you find at the top of every German hill. There were wooden seats fitted into the semi-circular wall. In the centre of the horse-shoe was a wooden table painted rusty red, and upon

trestles at one side there stood a cask, and on the red table were four glass beer mugs.

The Sanitätsrath was wiping his perspiring brow with his white shirt sleeve and Mrs. Hands was fanning herself slowly with a very white handkerchief.

"Yes, that is all there is to it," the Sanitätsrath lisped amiably. He combed his beard with three fingers. He peeped at them all with a queer smile and, bending down, he picked up from the bath-chair his black alpaca jacket which he slowly put on, and his brown straw hat which he crushed down over his eyes.

"So!" he ejaculated comfortably.

Annette had sunk down upon a seat, her head leaning back against the stone wall and her eyes closed. Mrs. Hands was leaning forward towards the table upon which her fingers drummed slowly. And Philip Hands, lost in an Anglo-Saxon amazement at the inappropriateness of the doctor's actions, asked with a slight touch of irritation, "What the deuce is the meaning of it all?"

The doctor glanced at him quickly and negligently across his shoulder. He reached out and took a large beer mug from the table. He put it beneath the tap of the barrel and when it was filled he held it to his lips and drank with deep satisfaction.

"So!" he exclaimed once more. Then he sat down beside Mrs. Hands and slowly extended his spidery fingers to her wrist.

"It is a very good pulse," he said. He remained for some time gazing at the ground, then he looked at Annette von Droste.

"So, Excellency," he said, with an air of tender malice, "last night we were mad, and to-day we are sane again?"

Annette slowly opened her eyes.

"Oh, we are all quite sane again," the Sanitätsrath said. He pointed a thin, white and curved forefinger exactly at her nose.

"Listen, you," he said. "I will tell you how it was. You were about to promise to marry his young Excellency the Second Secretary of Embassy. You say to yourself: Now you will have your last moment of freedom! You will come and seek for the lost Grand Duke. For when you are married to this gentleman you will lose your liberty and never will he agree to permit you such a breach of the laws. So you creep up through the woods and you are frightened and alarmed, and after a long climb you come last night upon my two large ones. Last night my large ogres were very merry and noisy. I heard them far down below and you saw them, and you thought you have become mad because of

your ancestors, and all such nonsense as I am for ever contesting. So you run back and tell our young friend that you are unfit to marry him. And then again once more this morning in your agony of mind you run here again to see if still the shapes of your madness existed. . . . Yes, is that not all true?"

Annette von Droste gazed with all her large eyes at the Sanitätsrath.

"And I was not mad," she whispered.

The Sanitätsrath slowly crossed his arms in their alpaca sleeves. "Then there is an end of it," he said, "and it all ends very well."

"But it isn't an end of it at all," Philip Hands exclaimed. "I must have some explanation of all this foolery!"

The Sanitätsrath looked at him penetratingly for a long time. Suddenly he rose and catching Hands by the wrist in his firm doctor's grasp, he led him swiftly out on to the ridge. He pointed straight down into each of the rocky cups decorated with the torn pines that were below them, one on each hand.

"What do you see?" he said.

Philip answered, "Oh, I know all that."

"They are quite still now," the professor said. "Both large ones. They are asleep. But I will give you a thousand pounds to go down into either of those valleys. I will give two thousand. I will give you ten thousand. I will give you all my fortune if you will bring me the thigh bone of the skeleton that is near the shoulder of the Large One on our left."

"Damn you!" Philip exclaimed. "Don't you know I am just engaged to be married?"

"I do not need the thigh bone," the professor lisped gently. "It is nothing to me. Yet I offer you a quarter of a million marks if you will fetch it for me. And you will not do it. . . . Then you may tell Her Excellency Annette that you are paying a quarter of a million marks in order to prove her sanity. For if you believed my large ones mere illusions, you would go down and fetch me that thigh bone. Yet now! There! You shudder all over your body and start back when I draw your wrist one-fifth of an inch downwards as if I were about to force you towards the slope."

Philip swore beneath his breath. The Sanitätsrath led him back towards the little alcove.

"So then," he said, "there is an end of it."

Annette leant suddenly forward.

"Excellent Wirkicher Geheim Sanitätsrath," she pleaded,

"would it not help in the cure both of myself and Mrs. Hands if you would explain a little more?"

Von Salzer caught all the ends of his beard into his right hand.

"It is all explained that I can explain," he said. "I am a child in these matters. . . . Oh, oh!" he checked the expostulations that were rising to her lips. "If you could ask the Hofrath von Kellermann—a biologist now! But a mere nerve-doctor like myself! How can I explain these things? There they are, my two large ogres. They help me to cure my patients of a certain class. My business is to cure patients of a certain class, and that is the end of it, for me."

"But the Hofrath von Kellermann was buried this morning," Philip Hands exclaimed.

"No, no," the doctor answered amiably, "his body was taken to the train. He is to be buried in Berlin in the Hedwigs Kirche in four days' time. There will a great ceremony and many speeches. He was a biologist of world-wide fame."

Over his folded arms the doctor looked reminiscently at the ground.

"For three years," he said, "on and off for every day the Hofrath has sat here observing my Large Ones. He had a little donkey cart. It brought up this barrel of good beer that he will never drink again. He has surveyed them with field glasses; he has measured them with geometric projections, he has watched them in their sleep. For hours and hours he has sat here alone, he has sat here with me and never have I known a man of such unflagging industry and of such enormous skill. I wish I could show you the model of the skeleton of one of my Large Ones that he has made by conjecture. They differ, he says, as much from man as from the larger apes, only in the disproportionately enormous length of the spine from the lower ribs downwards."

"But where is the romance in all this?" Annette von Droste said. "Where is all the wonder?"

The doctor smiled at her—a sunny and friendly smile.

"Child," he said, "you have heard of Woden and Thor. Well, the Hofrath in consultation with Professor Dr. von Göbel the historian of the University of Isclimgen arrived at the conclusion that my Large Ones gave rise to the legend of Woden and Thor, the deities of the high and wonderful past of us Teutons. I know nothing of these things, for I am neither a historian nor a bioligist. But this opinion is by no means a new one in the Christian

world since the convent of Drieselheim, as you will find in any guide book, was built in the year 969 just after the date of the conversion of this part of Germany to Christianity. In order to enclose for ever within these valleys, two immense devils—*duo immanes diaboli.* And from that date until the convent was shelled during the war between Prussia and Austria and the nuns dispersed—from that date until the year 1866 the convent was never without these brave and courageous sisters who were of the opinion that by their prayers alone they kept back from our beloved nation the horrors of pagan worship."

"But hang it all!" Philip Hands said. "You don't mean to say that these things were really pagan gods, or that the prayers of nuns kept them shut up in a valley?"

"I don't mean to tell you anything, my friend," the doctor said. "These are things for specialists. Specialists in the history of religion will tell you one thing; specialists in biology another; historians another; I, I am a humble nerve doctor. And if I report to you the conclusions of the Hofrath von Kellermann and his scientific colleagues which will be published in a lucid and compendious volume, I don't do any more than give you the faintest shadows of their splendid arguments which, according to my humble lights, I have mastered in order to be of service to my patients. For my business is to assure people who are in doubt as to their sanity that they are sane."

"But the Hofrath von Kellermann——" Philip Hands began.

"The Hofrath von Kellermann," the doctor continued, "died here yesterday on his four hundred and twenty-first visit to my Large Ones. How he died is not known. He was found crushed to pieces at the bottom of the mountain. But whether he was killed by a rock falling upon him or whether he himself was taken up and thrown down to this great distance, it is very difficult to say. For my Large Ones are of a placid and amiable disposition. They do not eat nor do they, as a rule, touch any living animal, though, at intervals of about a month, the Hofrath observed that one or the other of them would take a pine tree and grind it between his teeth. But the Hofrath was of opinion that this was not done for the sake of nourishment but more probably in order to while away the time as you might chew the stump of an unlit cigar."

"But——" Mr. Hands began again.

"Excellent Mr. Second Secretary of Embassy," the Sanitätsrath said, "in order to save you the trouble of incessant questions I

will try to sum up for you the conclusions arrived at by these eminent professors."

Philip Hands couldn't restrain himself from remarking, "I don't see why you haven't got some American agent to boom these—these giants? It would have been the sensation of the world."

And at the same moment Mrs. Hands exclaimed:

"Don't continue to exhibit yourself as an indomitable ass, Philip!" The Fräulein von Droste, intent upon her more romantic train of mind, asked:

"And the lost Grand Duke?"

The doctor glanced at her quietly and amiably.

"Ah, my never to be sufficiently lamented and glorious lord!" he said. "It was his case that set me on to preach the crusade that I am never tired of preaching—the crusade that there is no such thing as madness. They said he was mad but he was a man of grandiloquent schemes and magnificent achievements. It was simply that he was outside the plan of his circumstances. He desired to be greater than Tiberias so he built splendid palaces that his subjects couldn't pay for. He desired to be greater than Alexander so he was perpetually raising forces to prepare for a struggle against Prussia. He desired to emulate Hercules and so he came here to fight with the Large Ones, the secret of whose existence was the heritage of his illustrious position. He came here, you understand, alone, the sisters of the convent and the officials of his court begging him to desist from the dangerous adventure. And that is all that is known of him! There was never another trace. Where do his bones lie rotting? Who knows? As a young man, being his body physician, I searched every nook of the valley, I climbed in between the legs of the Large Ones as they slept."

"You!" Mr. Philip Hands exclaimed.

"Excellent Mr. Second Secretary," the doctor said ironically, "if you will climb down and examine these beings who appear to be now once more asleep, you will discover that their forms are covered with a grey-black hair, so coarse that it resembles the plants known as mares'-tails, and the grain of their flesh is so huge that with its indentations and the dirt that is upon it, it resembles a rough and uncultivated field, whilst the warmth that they give out is so considerable that each of these little valleys like cups appears like a greenhouse for heat and the stench is intolerable. If you will only climb you will observe all these things."

"Oh, thanks," Mr. Hands explained, "I am not a connoisseur in stinks!"

"Yet all these things I observed thirty-six years ago," the Sanitätsrath said, "when I was a young doctor, and spent six months in this valley, searching for the lost Grand Duke, of whom no vestige was ever discovered."

"Then he may be still alive—still here!" Annette von Droste exclaimed.

"Assuredly he may be still alive and still here," the doctor said, "who knows? The peasants say say see him from time to time riding all glorious upon his *schimmel*."

"But, I say," Philip Hands interrupted again. "If these fellows have been here all this time, how is it that nobody has ever talked of them?"

"My friend," the Sanitätsrath answered, "for centuries the peasants have talked of them. Twenty years ago you might have heard from any of these peasants of the feats of what they call the giants. You would hear now, when they desire to tell each other that it is time to light the stove to cook their bread, they throw great rocks from one side of the mountain to the other, as you have witnessed. The learned Vonggobel interprets this action of theirs differently. He says these actions are the outcome of a rudimentary desire for play, as you would observe the larger apes take up curiously a fragment of straw, and then cast it from them. And you would have heard from the peasants twenty years ago of how, when my Large Ones scratch their sides, it gives off a sound like the screaming of a thousand fiends. In this, the learned Von Kellermann agrees, though he says the sounds more rightly resemble that made by the crushing of metals under the stamp of gold-refining machines—a sort of metallic scream. In short, you have heard it. Twenty years ago you might have heard these things from the lips of the peasants, but now, fearing ridicule, they keep silent, though they talk amongst themselves, as they do of the lost Grand Duke, of great fowls resembling cocks, whose footsteps, twenty yards long, are seen in winter mornings in the snow, and of the Witches' Sabbaths called Walpürgis Nights, and of all the other things of which the peasants discourse in winter, when the snow is high over the roofs and the pine-knots burn merrily and the spinning-wheels turn in those lonely valleys."

"Oh, we know all about folk-lore," Mr. Philip Hands said.

"Then here you have the making of the folk-lore for yourself,"

the Sanitätsrath said, "such folk-lore as you yourself will tell your grandchildren when the snow is thick above your roof and above the limbs of my Large Ones, who do not mind snow upon their mountain-tops. For folk-lore is the interpretation set by common minds to explain facts which they cannot otherwise explain. How you will explain them I do not know."

"Then, why don't *you* explain them?" the indomitable Mr. Hands exclaimed.

"I do not explain them," the doctor said, "because in these matters I have an uninstructed mind. They have been explained as Woden and Thor, but they are not gods. They have been explained as immense devils, but they are not immense devils, since the existence of gods or devils presupposes a will, and my Large Ones have no wills, having reclined for thousands of years in the same valley. They have been explained as the secret warnings of the Grand Ducal House, since it is said that when one of them cries out, every twenty years or so, a Grand Duke dies. Yet assuredly their purpose cannot have been to warn Grand Dukes of their approaching deaths, since they existed thousands of years before there were any grand dukes. For me, they are the instruments of curing people who imagine themselves mad through the hearing of strange sounds and the seeing of incredible sights. I bring these people up here and I say, 'Listen and behold!' and they hear sounds, and they see sights, stranger than any that they can imagine. Thus by the Grace of God, in Whose hands we all are, 67.3 per cent. of my patients find cures. So you have many explanations afforded to you. For the Early Pagans they were Woden and Thor, and some used their fame for their own purposes. For me they are strange things that exist, and I use them for my own purposes; for the peasant women they are the Giant Brothers, and the peasant women use the stories of them in lulling their children to sleep, which is, perhaps, the most sensible purpose of all."

"But what *does* it all amount to?" Mr. Philip Hands asked.

"Oh, my excellent Anglo-Saxon friend!" the doctor ejaculated, with his first sign of exasperation. "What does it amount to? The well-known Professor of General Knowledge, von Imhoff zu Reutershausen, is contributing a general preface to the monumental work of the deceased Hofrath von Kellermann. In this the professor says—but I must warn you that he is regarded by his colleagues as romantic and unsound—the professor utters, if I can remember, these words:

" 'Here, therefore, amongst these stupendous and grave vastnesses, there lie these grey survivals of a time which went before the very foundations of our splendid Teutonic race, whose destinies have broadened down to the imperial heritage so well known to our own day. It is to be observed (see page 126 of text) that here are two adult males of an unknown and obviously prehistoric race. That there were giants before our days has been observed by many a classical writer. Thus we have the phrase, "*Vixerunt fortes ante Agamemnon.*" And traces of the existence of such giants are to be observed in the mythology and legends of almost every race——' "

"But hang it all!" Philip Hands exclaimed. "These chaps appear to me immortal?"

" 'Immortal these survivors of a heavy antiquity may appear to our limited conceptions, but the flesh of which they are made up is not indestructible. In what cataclysm their fellows perished who shall tell? But traces of many cataclysms are to be observed upon our globe sufficient to have destroyed all that was destructible of these immortal beings. Here, then, these two survivors sit—these two adult males. And if, as Professor von Gagern observes, all life, all will, all emotion, all motion, all passion, all appetite, is brought about by the search of the eternal male for the eternal female, then their listless immobility is sufficiently explained. Here they sit, having exhausted the limits of the globe in the unavailing search for a female of their own species. But all such females are dead—are destroyed. They sit close together in an eternal ennui of immortality, casting into the air from time to time that which comes next to their hands, waiting through the eternal ages! And what shall be the end of them——' "

"But, I say," Mr. Hands exclaimed, "if this blessed book about them is published, there will be an end of your practice?"

Dr. von Salzer looked for a long time at the young man.

"The essence of my practice is," he said, "the principle, and the principle will remain. Still, in the world there will be a thousand inexplicable things. For you will never be able to explain to me or any other man how it is that the Fräulein Annette von Droste should desire to unite herself to yourself."

"Oh, I say!" Philip exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that that is a form of madness?"

"I say merely," the Sanitätsrath answered dryly, "that it is inexplicable."

He pulled out his watch and said, "My consultation hour will have arrived in three-quarters of an hour. We have just time to descend the hill."

Annette von Droste rose briskly:

"So that the Grand Duke William," she said, "may be still in these valleys?"

The Sanitätsrath pushed the rubbed-tyred bath-chair out of the opening of the grotto.

"The Grand Duke may well exist," he said. "But you have done with Grand Dukes. Your business is to darn stockings."

"At any rate," Mrs. Hands piped suddenly, "I shall walk down the hill upon my own feet."

"But I say, you haven't explained . . .?" Philip Hands was beginning.

"My friend," von Salzer answered, "even for the Second Secretary of a Legation, there must arrive a time when he shall stand naked upon the shores of the world and discover that each of us is alone here and without one single companion. Then he must do all his explaining for himself or leave it to God. It is now a very good moment to cross the ridge and descend the hill. The Large Ones are now slumbering, who can say when they will wake or what perils we should miss when they did awaken? Let us go now towards the naked beaches of the end of the world."

"Now, what the deuce does that mean?" Philip Hands grumbled in the ear of Annette von Droste.

"Oh, the darling Sanitätsrath is so sentimental," she answered. "I wonder if *he* has ever seen the ghost of the Grand Duke riding splendidly upon his *schimmel*?"

. . . . . .

Holloway Horn

THE OLD MAN

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Martin Thompson was not a desirable character. He possessed a clever, plausible tongue, and for years past had lived, with no little success, on his wits. He had promoted doubtful boxing com-

petitions and still more doubtful sweepstakes. He had been a professional backer, in which capacity he had defrauded the bookies; again, a bookmaker who had swindled his "clients." There was more cunning than imagination in his outlook, but, within his limits, he possessed a certain distorted ability.

He was known to his intimates as Knocker Thompson, and as such had a surprisingly wide reputation. In outward appearance he was a gentleman, for long experience had taught him to avoid the flashy and distinctive in dress. Indeed, his quiet taste had often proved a valuable business asset.

Naturally, his fortunes varied, but he was usually more or less in funds. As Knocker sometimes said in his more genial moments: "For every mug that dies there's ten others born."

Funds were rather low, however, on the evening when he met the old man. Knocker had spent the early part of the evening with two acquaintances in a hotel near Leicester Square. It was a business meeting, and relations had been a little strained; opinions had been freely expressed which indicated a complete lack of confidence in Knocker, and an unmistakable atmosphere had resulted. Not that he *resented* the opinions in the least, but at that juncture he *needed* the unquestioned trust of the two men.

He was not in the best of humours, therefore, as he turned into Whitcomb Street on his way to Charing Cross. The normal plainness of his features was deepened by a scowl, and the general result startled the few people who glanced at him.

But at eight o'clock in the evening, Whitcomb Street is not a crowded thoroughfare, and there was no one near them when the old man spoke to him. He was standing in a passage near the Pall Mall end, and Knocker could not see him clearly.

"Hullo, Knocker!" he said.

Thompson swung round.

In the darkness he made out the dim figure, the most conspicuous feature of which was a long, white beard.

"Hullo!" returned Thompson, suspiciously, for as far as he knew he did not number among his acquaintances an old man with a white beard.

"It's cold . . ." said the old man.

"What d'you want?" asked Thompson curtly. "Who are you?"

"I am an old man, Knocker."

"Look here, what's the game? I don't know you . . ."

"No. But I know you."

"If that's all you've got to say . . ." said Knocker uneasily.

"It is nearly all. Will you buy a paper? It is not an ordinary paper, I assure you."

"How do you mean . . . not an ordinary paper?"

"It is to-morrow night's *Echo,*" said the old man calmly.

"You're loopy, old chap, that's what's wrong with you. Look here, things aren't too brisk, but here's half a dollar . . . and better luck!" For all his lack of principle, Knocker had the crude generosity of those who live precariously.

"Luck!" The old man laughed with a quietness that jarred on Knocker's nerves. In some queer way it seemed to run up and down his spine.

"Look here!" he said again, conscious of some strange, unreal quality in the old, dimly-seen figure in the passage. "What's the blinking game?"

"It is the oldest game in the world, Knocker."

"Not so free with my name . . . if you don't mind."

"Are you ashamed of it?"

"No," said Knocker stoutly. "What do you want? I've got no time to waste with the likes of you."

"Then go . . . Knocker."

"What do you *want?*" Knocker insisted, strangely uneasy.

"Nothing. Won't you take the paper? There is no other like it in the world. Nor will there be—for twenty-four hours."

"I don't suppose there *are* many of to-morrow's papers on sale . . . yet," said Knocker with a grin.

"It contains to-morrow's winners," said the old man, in the same casual manner.

"I don't think!" retorted Knocker.

"There it is; you may read for yourself."

From the darkness a paper was thrust at Knocker, whose unwilling fingers closed on it. A laugh came from somewhere in the recesses in the passage, and Knocker was alone.

He was suddenly and uncomfortably aware of his beating heart, but gripped himself and walked on until he came to a lighted shop front where he glanced at the paper.

"Thursday, July 29, 1926 . . ." he read.

He thought a moment.

It was Wednesday . . . he was positive it was Wednesday. He took out his diary. It was Wednesday, the twenty-eighth day of July—the last day of the Kempton Park meeting. He had no doubt on the point, none whatever.

With a strange feeling he glanced at the paper again. July 29,

1926. He turned to the back page almost instinctively—the page with the racing results.

Gatwick. . . .

That day's meeting was at Kempton Park. To-morrow was the first day of the Gatwick meeting, and there, staring at him, were the five winners. He passed his hand across his forehead; it was damp with cold perspiration.

"There's a trick somewhere," he muttered to himself, and carefully re-examined the date of the paper. It was printed on each page . . . clear and unaltered. He scrutinised the unit figure of the year, but the "six" had not been tampered with.

He glanced hurriedly at the front page. There was a flaring headline about the Coal Strike . . . that wasn't twenty-*five*. With professional care he examined the racing results. Inkerman had won the first race . . . Inkerman—and Knocker had made up his mind to back Paper Clip with more money than he could afford to lose. Paper Clip was merely an also-ran. He noticed that people who passed were glancing at him curiously. Hurriedly he pushed the paper into an inner pocket and walked on.

Never had Knocker so needed a drink. He entered a snug little "pub" near Charing Cross and was thankful to find the saloon bar nearly deserted. Fortified with his drink he turned again to the paper. Inkerman had come home at 6 to 1. He made certain hurried but satisfactory calculations. Salmon House had won the second; he had expected that, but not at such a price . . . 7 to 4 on. Shallot—Shallot of all horses!—had romped away with the third, the big race. Seven lengths . . . at 100 to 8! Knocker licked his dry lips. There was no fake about the paper in his hand. He knew the horses that were running at Gatwick the following day and the results were there before him. The fourth and fifth winners were at short prices; but Inkerman and Shallot were enough . . .

It was too late to get into touch with any of the bookmakers that evening, and in any case it would not be advisable to put money on before the day of the race. The better way would be to go to Gatwick in the morning and wire the bets from the course.

He had another drink . . . and another.

Gradually, in the genial atmosphere of the saloon bar, his uneasiness left him. The affair ceased to appear uncanny and grotesque, and became a part of the casual happenings of the day. Into Knocker's slightly fuddled brain came the memory of a film

he had once seen which had made a big impression on him at the time. There was an Eastern magician in the film, with a white beard, a long, white beard just like the one belonging to the old man. The magician had done the most extraordinary things . . . on the screen.

But whatever the explanation, Knocker was satisfied it was not a fake. The old chap had not asked for any money; indeed, he had not even taken the half-crown that Knocker had offered him. And as Knocker knew, you always collected the dibs—or attempted to—if you were running a fake.

He thought pleasantly of what he would do in the ring at Gatwick the following day. He was in rather low water, but he could put his hands on just about enough to make the bookies sit up. And with a second winner at a 100 to 8!

He had still another drink and stood the barman one too.

"D'you know anything for to-morrow?" The man behind the bar knew Thompson quite well by sight and reputation.

Knocker hesitated.

"Yes," he said. "Sure thing. Salmon House in the second race. Price'll be a bit short, but it's a snip."

"Thanks very much; I'll have a bit on meself."

Ultimately he left the saloon bar. He was a little shaky; his doctor had warned him not to drink, but surely on such a night . . .

The following morning he went to Gatwick. It was a meeting he liked, and usually he was very lucky there. But that day it was not merely a question of luck. There was a streak of caution in his bets on the first race, but he flung caution to the wind after Inkerman had come in a comfortable winner—*and at* 6 *to* 1. The horse and the price! He had no doubts left. Salmon House won the second, a hot favourite at 7 to 4 on.

In the big race most of the punters left Shallot alone. The horse had little form, and there was no racing reason why anyone should back him. He was among what the bookies call "the Rags." But Knocker cared nothing for "form" that day. He spread his money judiciously. Twenty here, twenty there. Not until ten minutes before the race did he wire any money to the West End offices, but some of the biggest men in the game opened their eyes when his wires came through. He was out to win a fortune. And he won.

As the horses entered the straight one of them was lengths ahead of the field. It carried the flashing yellow and blue of

Shallot's owner. The groan that went up from the punters around him was satisfactory, but there was no thrill in the race for him; he had been certain that Shallot would win. There was no objection . . . and he proceeded to collect.

His pockets were bulging with notes, but his winnings were as nothing compared with the harvest he would reap from the big men in the West End. He ordered a bottle of champagne, and with a silent grin drank the health of the old man with the beard before he sent for the taxi that would take him back to the station. There was no train for half-an-hour, and, when at last it started, his carriage had filled with racing men, among whom were several he knew. The wiser race-goers rarely wait until the end of a meeting.

Knocker was usually very expansive after a good day, but that afternoon he took no part in the conversation, with the exception of an occasional grunt when a remark was made to him. Try as he would he could not keep his thoughts away from the old man. It was the memory of the laugh that remained with him most vividly. He could still feel that queer sensation down his spine. . . .

On a sudden impulse he took out the paper, which was still in his pocket. He had no real interest in news, as such, for racing absorbed the whole of his very limited imagination. As far as he could tell from a casual inspection it was a very ordinary sort of paper. He made up his mind to get another in town and compare the two in order to see if the old man had spoken the truth. Not that it mattered very much, he assured himself.

Suddenly his incurious glance was held. A paragraph in the stop-press column had caught his eye. An exclamation burst from him.

"Death in race-train," the paragraph was headed. Knocker's heart was pumping, but he read on mechanically: "Mr. Martin Thompson, a well-known racing man, died this afternoon as he was returning from Gatwick."

He got no further; the paper fell from his limp fingers on to the floor of the carriage.

"Look at Knocker," someone said. He's ill . . ."

He was breathing heavily and with difficulty.

"Stop . . . stop the train," he gasped, and strove to rise and lurch towards the communications cord.

"Steady on, Knocker," one of them said, and grasped his arm. "You sit down, old chap . . . mustn't pull that darned thing. . . ."

He sat down . . . or rather collapsed into his seat. His head fell forward.

They forced whisky between his lips, but it was of no avail.

"He's dead," came the awestruck voice of the man who held him.

No one noticed the paper on the floor. In the general upset it had been kicked under the seat, and it is not possible to say what became of it. Perhaps it was swept up by the cleaners at Waterloo.

Perhaps . . .

No one knows.

Violet Hunt

THE PRAYER

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I

"It is but giving over of a game,
That must be lost."—PHILASTER.

"Come, Mrs. Arne—come, my dear, you must not give way like this! You can't stand it—you really can't! Let Miss Kate take you away—now do!" urged the nurse, with her most motherly of intonations.

"Yes, Alice, Mrs. Joyce is right. Come away—do come away—you are only making yourself ill. It is all over; you can do nothing! Oh, oh, do come away!" implored Mrs. Arne's sister, shivering with excitement and nervousness.

A few moments ago Dr. Graham had relinquished his hold on the pulse of Edward Arne with the hopeless movement of the eyebrows that meant—the end.

The nurse had made the little gesture of resignation that was possibly a matter of form with her. The young sister-in-law had hidden her face in her hands. The wife had screamed a scream that had turned them all hot and cold—and flung herself on the bed over her dead husband. There she lay; her cries were terrible, her sobs shook her whole body.

The three gazed at her pityingly, not knowing what to do next. The nurse, folding her hands, looked towards the doctor for

directions, and the doctor drummed with his fingers on the bedpost. The young girl timidly stroked the shoulder that heaved and writhed under her touch.

"Go away! Go away!" her sister reiterated continually, in a voice hoarse with fatigue and passion.

"Leave her alone, Miss Kate," whispered the nurse at last; "she will work it off best herself, perhaps."

She turned down the lamp, as if to draw a veil over the scene. Mrs. Arne raised herself on her elbow, showing a face stained with tears and purple with emotion.

"What! Not gone?" she said harshly. "Go away, Kate, go away! It is my house. I don't want you, I want no one—I want to speak to my husband. Will you go away—all of you. Give me an hour, half-an-hour—five minutes!"

She stretched out her arms imploringly to the doctor.

"Well . . ." said he, almost to himself.

He signed to the two women to withdraw, and followed them out into the passage. "Go and get something to eat," he said peremptorily, "while you can. We shall have trouble with her presently. I'll wait in the dressing-room."

He glanced at the twisting figure on the bed, shrugged his shoulders, and passed into the adjoining room, without, however, closing the door of communication. Sitting down in an arm-chair drawn up to the fire, he stretched himself and closed his eyes. The professional aspects of the case of Edward Arne rose up before him in all its interesting forms of complication. . . .

. . . . . .

It was just this professional attitude that Mrs. Arne unconsciously resented both in the doctor and in the nurse. Through all their kindness she had realised and resented their scientific interest in her husband, for to them he had been no more than a curious and complicated case; and now that the blow had fallen, she regarded them both in the light of executioners. Her one desire, expressed with all the shameless sincerity of blind and thoughtless misery, was to be free of their hateful presence and alone—alone with her dead!

She was weary of the doctor's subdued manly tones—of the nurse's commonplace motherliness, too habitually adapted to the needs of all to be appreciated by the individual—of the childish consolation of the young sister, who had never loved, never been married, did not know what sorrow was! Their expressions of

sympathy struck her like blows, the touch of their hands on her body, as they tried to raise her, stung her in every nerve.

With a sigh of relief she buried her head in the pillow, pressed her body more closely against that of her husband, and lay motionless.

Her sobs ceased.

. . . . . .

The lamp went out with a gurgle. The fire leaped up, and died. She raised her head and stared about her helplessly, then sinking down again she put her lips to the ear of the dead man.

"Edward—dear Edward!" she whispered, "why have you left me? Darling, why have you left me? I can't stay behind—you know I can't. I am too young to be left. It is only a year since you married me. I never thought it was only for a year. 'Till death us do part!' Yes, I know that's in it, but nobody ever thinks of that! I never thought of living without you! I meant to die with you. . . .

"No—no—I can't die—I must not—till my baby is born. You will never see it. Don't you want to see it? Don't you? Oh, Edward, speak! Say something, darling, one word—one little word! Edward! Edward! are you there? Answer me for God's sake, answer me!

"Darling, I am so tired of waiting. Oh, think, dearest. There is so little time. They only gave me half-an-hour. In half-an-hour they will come and take you away from me—take you where I can't come to you—with all my love I can't come to you! I know the place—I saw it once. A great lonely place full of graves, and little stunted trees dripping with dirty London rain . . . and gas-lamps flaring all round . . . but quite, quite dark where the grave is . . . a long grey stone just like the rest. How could you stay there?—all alone—all alone—without me?

"Do you remember, Edward, what we once said—that which-ever of us died first should come back to watch over the other, in the spirit? I promised you, and you promised me. What children we were! Death is not what we thought. It comforted us to say that then.

"Now, it's nothing—nothing—worse than nothing! I don't want your spirit—I can't see it—or feel it—I want you, you, your eyes that looked at me, your mouth that kissed me——"

She raised his arms and clasped them round her neck, and lay there very still, murmuring, "Oh, hold me, hold me! Love me if

you can. Am I hateful? This is me! These are your arms. . . ."

The doctor in the next room moved in his chair. The noise awoke her from her dream of contentment, and she unwound the dead arm from her neck, and, holding it up by the wrist, considered it ruefully.

"Yes, I can put it round me, but I have to hold it there. It is quite cold—it doesn't care. Ah, my dear, you don't care! You are dead. I kiss you, but you don't kiss me. Edward! Edward! Oh, for heaven's sake kiss me once. Just once!

"No, no, that won't do—that's not enough! that's nothing! worse than nothing! I want you back, you, all you. . . . What shall I do? . . . I often pray. . . . Oh, if there be a God in heaven, and if He ever answered a prayer, let Him answer mine—my only prayer. I'll never ask another—and give you back to me! As you were—as I loved you—as I adored you! He must listen. He must! My God, my God, he's mine—he's my husband, he's my lover—give him back to me!"

. . . . . .

——"Left alone for half-an-hour or more with the corpse! It's not right!"

The muttered expression of the nurse's revolted sense of professional decency came from the head of the staircase, where she had been waiting for the last few minutes. The doctor joined her.

"Hush, Mrs. Joyce! I'll go to her now."

The door creaked on its hinges as he gently pushed it open and went in.

"What's that? What's that?" screamed Mrs. Arne. "Doctor! Doctor! Don't touch me! Either I am dead or he is alive!"

"Do you want to kill yourself, Mrs. Arne?" said Dr. Graham, with calculated sternness, coming forward; "come away!"

"Not dead! Not dead!" she murmured.

"He is dead, I assure you. Dead and cold an hour ago! Feel!" He took hold of her, as she lay face downwards, and in so doing he touched the dead man's cheek—it was not cold! Instinctively his finger sought a pulse.

"Stop! Wait!" he cried in his intense excitement. "My dear Mrs. Arne, control yourself!"

But Mrs. Arne had fainted, and fallen heavily off the bed on the other side. Her sister, hastily summoned, attended to her, while the man they had all given over for dead was, with faint

gasps and sighs and reluctant moans, pulled, as it were, hustled and dragged back over the threshold of life.

. . . . . .

II

"Why do you always wear black, Alice?" asked Esther Graham. "You are not in mourning that I know of."

She was Dr. Graham's only daughter and Mrs Arne's only friend. She sat with Mrs. Arne in the dreary drawing-room of the house in Chelsea. She had come to tea. She was the only person who ever did come to tea there.

She was brusque, kind, and blunt, and had a talent for making inappropriate remarks. Six years ago Mrs. Arne had been a widow for an hour! Her husband had succumbed to an apparently mortal illness, and for the space of an hour had lain dead. When suddenly and inexplicably he had revived from his trance, the shock, combined with six weeks' nursing, had nearly killed his wife. All this Esther had heard from her father. She herself had only come to know Mrs. Arne aftter her child was born, and all the tragic circumstances of her husband's illness put aside, and it was hoped forgotten. And when her idle question received no answer from the pale absent woman who sat opposite, with listless lack-lustre eyes fixed on the green and blue flames dancing in the fire, she hoped it had passed unnoticed. She waited for five minutes for Mrs. Arne to resume the conversation, then her natural impatience got the better of her.

"Do say something, Alice!" she implored.

"Esther, I beg your pardon!" said Mrs. Arne. "I was thinking."

"What were you thinking of?"

"I don't know."

"No, of course you don't. People who sit and stare into the fire never do think, really. They are only brooding and making themselves ill, and that is what you are doing. You mope, you take no interest in anything, you never go out—I am sure you have not been out of doors to-day?"

"No—yes—I believe not. It is so cold."

"You are sure to feel the cold if you sit in the house all day, and sure to get ill! Just look at yourself!"

Mrs. Arne rose and looked at herself in the Italian mirror over the chimney-piece. It reflected faithfully enough her even pallor,

her dark hair and eyes, the sweeping length of her eyelashes, the sharp curves of her nostrils, and the delicate arch of her eyebrows, that formed a thin sharp black line, so clear as to seem almost unnatural.

"Yes, I do look ill," she said with conviction.

"No wonder. You choose to bury yourself alive."

"Sometimes I do feel as if I lived in a grave. I look up at the ceiling and fancy it is my coffin-lid."

"Don't please talk like that!" expostulated Miss Graham, pointing to Mrs. Arne's little girl. "If only for Dolly's sake, I think you should not give way to such morbid fancies. It isn't good for her to see you like this always."

"Oh, Esther," the other exclaimed, stung into something like vivacity, "don't reproach me! I hope I am a good mother to my child!"

"Yes, dear, you are a model mother—and model wife too. Father says the way you look after your husband is something wonderful, but don't you think for your own sake you might try to be a little gayer? You encourage these moods, don't you? What is it? Is it the house?"

She glanced around her—at the high ceiling, at the heavy damask portières, the tall cabinets of china, the dim oak panelling—it reminded her of a neglected museum. Her eyes travelled into the farthest corners, where the faint filmy dusk was already gathering, lit only by the bewildering cross-lights of the glass panels of cabinet doors—to the tall narrow windows—then back again to the woman in her mourning dress, cowering by the fire. She said sharply——

"You should go out more."

"I don't like to—leave my husband."

"Oh, I know that he is delicate and all that, but still, does he never permit you to leave him? Does he never go out by himself?"

"Not often!"

"And you have no pets! It is very odd of you. I simply can't imagine a house without animals!"

"We did have a dog once," answered Mrs. Arne plaintively, "but it howled so we had to give it away. It would not go near Edward. . . . But please don't imagine that I am dull! I have my child." She laid her hand on the flaxen head at her knee.

Miss Graham rose, frowning.

"Ah, you are too bad!" she exclaimed. "You are like a widow

exactly, with one child, stroking its orphan head and saying, 'Poor fatherless darling.' "

Voices were heard outside. Miss Graham stopped talking quite suddenly, and sought her veil and gloves on the mantelpiece.

"You need not go, Esther," said Mrs. Arne. "It is only my husband."

"Oh, but it is getting late," said the other, crumpling up her gloves in her muff, and shuffling her feet nervously.

"Come!" said her hostess, with a bitter smile, "put your gloves on properly—if you must go—but it is quite early still."

"Please don't go, Miss Graham," put in the child.

"I must. Go and meet your papa, like a good girl."

"I don't want to."

"You mustn't talk like that, Dolly," said the doctor's daughter absently, still looking towards the door. Mrs. Arne rose and fastened the clasps of the big fur-cloak for her friend. The wife's white, sad, oppressed face came very close to the girl's cheerful one, as she murmured in a low voice——

"You don't like my husband, Esther? I can't help noticing it. Why don't you?"

"Nonsense!" retorted the other, with the emphasis of one who is repelling an overture accusation. "I do, only——"

"Only what?"

"Well, dear, it is foolish of me, of course, but I am—a little afraid of him."

"Afraid of Edward!" said his wife slowly. "Why should you be?"

"Well, dear—you see—I—I suppose women can't help being a little afraid of their friends' husbands—they can spoil their friendships with their wives in a moment, if they choose to disapprove of them. I really must go! Good-bye, child; give me a kiss! Don't ring, Alice. Please don't! I can open the door for myself——"

"Why should you?" said Mrs. Arne. "Edward is in the hall; I heard him speaking to Foster."

"No; he has gone into his study. Good-bye, you apathetic creature!" She gave Mrs. Arne a brief kiss and dashed out of the room. The voices outside had ceased, and she had reasonable hopes of reaching the door without being intercepted by Mrs. Arne's husband. But he met her on the stairs. Mrs. Arne, listening intently from her seat by the fire, heard her exchange a few shy sentences with him, the sound of which died away as they went

downstairs together. A few moments after, Edward Arne came into the room and dropped into the chair just vacated by his wife's visitor.

He crossed his legs and said nothing. Neither did she.

His nearness had the effect of making the woman look at once several years older. Where she was pale he was well-coloured; the network of little filmy wrinkles that, on a close inspection, covered her face, had no parallel on his smooth skin. He was handsome; soft, well-groomed flakes of auburn hair lay over his forehead, and his steely blue eyes shone equably, a contrast to the sombre fire of hers, and the masses of dark crinkly hair that shaded her brow. The deep lines of permanent discontent furrowed that brow as she sat with her chin propped on her hands, and her elbows resting on her knees. Neither spoke. When the hands of the clock over Mrs. Arne's head pointed to seven, the white-aproned figure of the nurse appeared in the doorway, and the little girl rose and kissed her mother very tenderly.

Mrs. Arne's forehead contracted. Looking uneasily at her husband, she said to the child tentatively, yet boldly, as one grasps a nettle, "Say good-night to your father!"

The child obeyed, saying, "Good-night" indifferently in her father's direction.

"Kiss him!"

"No, please—please not."

Her mother looked down on her curiously, sadly. . . .

"You are a naughty, spoilt child!" she said, but without conviction. "Excuse her, Edward."

He did not seem to have heard.

"Well, if you don't care——" said his wife bitterly. "Come, child!" She caught the little girl by the hand and left the room.

At the door she half turned and looked fixedly at her husband. It was a strange ambiguous gaze; in it passion and dislike were strangely combined. Then she shivered and closed the door softly after her.

The man in the arm-chair sat with no perceptible change of attitude, his unspeculative eyes fixed on the fire, his hands clasped idly in front of him. The pose was obviously habitual. The servant brought lights and closed the shutters, drew the curtains, and made up the fire noisily, without, however, eliciting any reproof from his master.

Edward Arne was an ideal master, as far as Foster was concerned. He kept cases of cigars, but never smoked them, although

the supply had often to be renewed. He did not care what he ate or drank, although he kept as good a cellar as most gentlemen—Foster knew that. He never interfered, he counted for nothing, he gave no trouble. Foster had no intention of ever leaving such an easy place. True, his master was not cordial; he very seldom addressed him or seemed to know whether he was there, but then neither did he grumble if the fire in the study was allowed to go out, or interfere with Foster's liberty in any way. He had a better place of it than Annette, Mrs. Arne's maid, who would be called up in the middle of the night to bathe her mistress's forehead with eau-de-Cologne, or made to brush her long hair for hours together to soothe her. Naturally enough Foster and Annette compared notes as to their respective situations, and drew unflattering parallels between this capricious wife and model husband.

III

Miss Graham was not a demonstrative woman. On her return home she somewhat startled her father, as he sat by his study table, deeply interested in his diagnosis book, by the sudden violence of her embrace.

"Why this excitement?" he asked, smiling and turning round. He was a young-looking man for his age; his thin wiry figure and clear colour belied the evidence of his hair, tinged with grey, and the tired wrinkles that gave value to the acuteness and brilliancy of the eyes they surrounded.

"I don't know!" she replied, "only you are so nice and alive somehow. I always feel like this when I come back from seeing the Arnes."

"Then don't go to see the Arnes."

"I'm so fond of her, father, and she will never come here to me, as you know. Or else nothing would induce me to enter her tomb of a house, and talk to that walking funeral of a husband of hers. I managed to get away to-day without having to shake hands with him. I always try to avoid it. But, father, I do wish you would go and see Alice."

"Is she ill?"

"Well, not exactly ill, I suppose, but her eyes make me quite uncomfortable, and she says such odd things! I don't know if it is you or the clergyman she wants, but she is all wrong somehow! She never goes out except to church; she never pays a call, or has any one to call on her! Nobody ever asks the Arnes to dinner,

and I'm sure I don't blame them—the sight of that man at one's table would spoil any party—and they never entertain. She is always alone. Day after day I go in and find her sitting over the fire, with that same brooding expression. I shouldn't be surprised in the least if she were to go mad some day. Father, what is it? What is the tragedy of the house? There is one I am convinced. And yet, though I have been the intimate friend of that woman for years, I know no more about her than the man in the street."

"She keeps her skeleton safe in the cupboard," said Dr. Graham. "I respect her for that. And please don't talk nonsense about tragedies. Alice Arne is only morbid—the malady of the age. And she is a very religious woman."

"I wonder if she complains of her odious husband to Mr. Bligh. She is always going to his services."

"Odious?"

"Yes, odious!" Miss Graham shuddered. "I cannot stand him! I cannot bear the touch of his cold froggy hands, and the sight of his fishy eyes! That inane smile of his simply makes me shrivel up. Father, honestly, do you like him yourself?"

"My dear, I hardly know him! It is his wife I have known ever since she was a child, and I a boy at college. Her father was my tutor. I never knew her husband till six years ago, when she called me in to attend him in a very serious illness. I suppose she never speaks of it? No? A very odd affair. For the life of me I cannot tell how he managed to recover. You needn't tell people, for it affects my reputation, but I didn't save him! Indeed I have never been able to account for it. The man was given over for dead!"

"He might as well be dead for all the good he is," said Esther scornfully. "I have never heard him say more than a couple of sentences in my life."

"Yet he was an exceedingly brilliant young man; one of the best men of his year at Oxford—a good deal run after—poor Alice was wild to marry him!"

"In love with that spiritless creature? He is like a house with some one dead in it, and all the blinds down!"

"Come, Esther, don't be morbid—not to say silly! You are very hard on the poor man! What's wrong with him? He is the ordinary, commonplace, cold-blooded specimen of humanity, a little stupid, a little selfish,—people who have gone through a serious illness like that are apt to be—but on the whole, a good husband, a good father, a good citizen——"

"Yes, and his wife is afraid of him, and his child hates him!" exclaimed Esther.

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Graham sharply. "The child is spoilt. Only children are apt to be—and the mother wants a change or a tonic of some kind. I'll go and talk to her when I have time. Go along and dress. Have you forgotten that George Graham is coming to dinner?"

After she had gone the doctor made a note on the corner of his blotting-pad, "Mem.: to go and see Mrs. Arne," and dismissed the subject of the memorandum entirely from his mind.

. . . . . .

George Graham was the doctor's nephew, a tall, weedy, cumbrous young man, full of fads and fallacies, with a gentle manner that somehow inspired confidence. He was several years younger than Esther, who loved to listen to his semi-scientific, semi-romantic stories of things met with in the course of his profession. "Oh, I come across very queer things!" he would say mysteriously, "There's a queer little widow——!"

"Tell me about your little widow?" asked Esther that day after dinner, when, her father having gone back to his study, she and her cousin sat together as usual.

He laughed.

"You like to hear of my professional experiences? Well, she certainly interested me," he said thoughtfully. "She is an odd psychological study in her way. I wish I could come across her again."

"Where did you come across her, and what is her name?"

"I don't know her name, I don't want to; she is not a personage to me, only a case. I hardly know her face even. I have never seen it except in the twilight. But I gathered that she lived somewhere in Chelsea, for she came out on to the Embankment with only a kind of lacy thing over her head; she can't live far off, I fancy."

Esther became instantly attentive. "Go on," she said.

"It was three weeks ago," said George Graham. "I was coming along the Embankment about ten o'clock. I walked through that little grove, you know, just between Cheyne Walk and the river, and I heard in there some one sobbing very bitterly. I looked and saw a woman sitting on a seat, with her head in her hands, crying. I was most awfully sorry, of course, and I thought I could perhaps do something for her, get her a glass of water, or

salts, or something. I took her for a woman of the people—it was quite dark, you know. So I asked her very politely if I could do anything for her, and then I noticed her hands—they were quite white and covered with diamonds."

"You were sorry you spoke, I suppose," said Esther.

"She raised her head and said—I believe she laughed—'Are you going to tell me to move on?'"

"She thought you were a policeman?"

"Probably—if she thought at all—but she was in a semi-dazed condition. I told her to wait till I came back, and dashed round the corner to the chemist's and bought a bottle of salts. She thanked me, and made a little effort to rise and go away. She seemed very weak. I told her I was a medical man, I started in and talked to her."

"And she to you?"

"Yes, quite straight. Don't you know that women always treat a doctor as if he were one step removed from their father confessor—not human—not in the same category as themselves? It is not complimentary to one as a man, but one hears a good deal one would not otherwise hear. She ended by telling me all about herself—in a veiled way, of course. It soothed her—relieved her—she seemed not to have had an outlet for years!"

"To a mere stranger!"

"To a doctor. And she did not know what she was saying half the time. She was hysterical, of course. Heavens! what nonsense she talked! She spoke of herself as a person somehow haunted, cursed by some malign fate, a victim of some fearful spiritual catastrophe, don't you know? I let her run on. She was convinced of the reality of a sort of 'doom' that she had fancied had befallen her. It was quite pathetic. Then it got rather chilly—she shivered—I suggested her going in. She shrank back; she said, 'If you only knew what a relief it is, how much less miserable I am out here! I can breathe; I can live—it is my only glimpse of the world that is alive—I live in a grave—oh, let me stay!' She seemed positively afraid to go home."

"Perhaps some one bullied her at home."

"I suppose so, but then—she had no husband. He died, she told me, years ago. She had adored him, she said——"

"Is she pretty?"

"Pretty! Well, I hardly noticed. Let me see! Oh, yes, I suppose she was pretty—no, now I think of it, she would be too worn and faded to be what you call pretty."

Esther smiled.

"Well, we sat there together for quite an hour, then the clock of Chelsea church struck eleven, and she got up and said 'Good-bye,' holding out her hand quite naturally, as if our meeting and conversation had been nothing out of the common. There was a sound like a dead leaf trailing across the walk and she was gone."

"Didn't you ask if you should see her again?"

"That would have been a mean advantage to take."

"You might have offered to see her home."

"I saw she did not mean me to."

"She was a lady, you say," pondered Esther. "How was she dressed?"

"Oh, all right, like a lady—in black—mourning, I suppose. She has dark crinkly hair, and her eyebrows are very thin and arched—I noticed that in the dusk."

"Does this photograph remind you of her?" asked Esther suddenly, taking him to the mantelpiece.

"Rather!"

"Alice! Oh, it couldn't be—she is not a widow, her husband is alive—has your friend any children?"

"Yes, one, she mentioned it."

"How old?"

"Six years old, I think she said. She talks of the 'responsibility of bringing up an orphan.'"

"George, what time is it?" Esther asked suddenly.

"About nine o'clock."

"Would you mind coming out with me?"

"I should like it. Where shall we go?"

"To St. Adhelm's! It is close by here. There is a special late service to-night, and Mrs. Arne is sure to be there."

"Oh, Esther—curiosity!"

"No, not mere curiosity. Don't you see if it is my Mrs. Arne who talked to you like this, it is very serious? I have thought her ill for a long time; but as ill as that!——"

At St. Adhelm's Church, Esther Graham pointed out a woman who was kneeling beside a pillar in an attitude of intense devotion and abandonment. She rose from her knees, and turned her rapt face up towards the pulpit whence the Reverend Ralph Bligh was holding his impassioned discourse. George Graham touched his cousin on the shoulder, and motioned to her to leave her place on the outermost rank of worshippers.

"That is the woman!" said he.

IV

"Mem.: to go and see Mrs. Arne." The doctor came across this note in his blotting-pad one day six weeks later. His daughter was out of town. He had heard nothing of the Arnes since her departure. He had promised to go and see her. He was a little conscience-stricken. Yet another week elapsed before he found time to call upon the daughter of his old tutor.

At the corner of Tite Street he met Mrs. Arne's husband, and stopped. A doctor's professional kindliness of manner is, or ought to be, independent of his personal likings and dislikings, and there was a pleasant cordiality about his greeting which should have provoked a corresponding fervour on the part of Edward Arne.

"How are you, Arne?" Graham said. "I was on my way to call on your wife."

"Ah—yes!" said Edward Arne, with the ascending inflection of polite acquiescence. A ray of blue from his eyes rested transitorily on the doctor's face, and in that short moment the latter noted its intolerable vacuity, and for the first time in his life felt a sharp pang of sympathy for the wife of such a husband.

"I suppose you are off to your club?—er—good-bye!" he wound up abruptly. With the best will in the world he somehow found it almost impossible to carry on a conversation with Edward Arne, who raised his hand to his hat-brim in token of salutation, smiled sweetly, and walked on.

"He really is extraordinarily good-looking," reflected the doctor, as he watched him down the street and safely over the crossing with a certain degree of solicitude for which he could not exactly account. "And yet one feels one's vitality ebbing out at the finger-ends as one talks to him. I shall begin to believe in Esther's absurd fancies about him soon. Ah, there's the little girl!" he exclaimed, as he turned into Cheyne Walk and caught sight of her with her nurse, making violent demonstrations to attract his attention. "She is alive, at any rate. How is your mother, Dolly?" he asked.

"Quite well, thank you," was the child's reply. She added, "She's crying. She sent me away because I looked at her. So I did. Her cheeks are quite red."

"Run away—run away and play!" said the doctor nervously. He ascended the steps of the house, and rang the bell very gently and neatly.

"Not at——" began Foster, with the intonation of polite falsehood, but stopped on seeing the doctor, who, with his daughter, was a privileged person. "Mrs. Arne will see you, Sir."

"Mrs. Arne is not alone?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes, Sir, quite alone. I have just taken tea in."

Dr. Graham's doubts were prompted by the low murmur as of a voice, or voices, which came to him through the open door of the room at the head of the stairs. He paused and listened while Foster stood by, merely remarking, "Mrs. Arne do talk to herself sometimes, Sir."

It was Mrs. Arne's voice—the doctor recognised it now. It was not the voice of a sane or healthy woman. He at once mentally removed his visit from the category of a morning call, and prepared for a semi-professional inquiry.

"Don't announce me," he said to Foster, and quietly entered the back drawing-room, which was separated by a heavy tapestry portière from the room where Mrs. Arne sat, with an open book on the table before her, from which she had been apparently reading aloud. Her hands were now clasped tightly over her face, and when, presently, she removed them and began feverishly to turn page after page of her book, the crimson of her cheeks was seamed with white where her fingers had impressed themselves.

The doctor wondered if she saw him, for though her eyes were fixed in his direction, there was no apprehension in them. She went on reading, and it was the text, mingled with passionate interjection and fragmentary utterances, of the Burial Service that met his ears.

"'For as in Adam all die!' All die! It says all! For he must reign. . . . The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. What shall they do if the dead rise not at all! . . . I die daily . . . ! Daily! No, no, better get it over . . . dead and buried . . . out of sight, out of mind . . . under a stone. Dead men don't come back. . . . Go on! Get it over. I want to hear the earth rattle on the coffin, and then I shall know it is done. 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit!' Oh, what did I do? What have I done? Why did I wish it so fervently? Why did I pray for it so earnestly? God gave me my wish——"

"Alice! Alice!" groaned the doctor.

She looked up. "'When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption——' 'Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, earth to earth——' Yes, that is it. 'After death, though worms destroy this body——'"

She flung the book aside and sobbed.

"That is what I was afraid of. My God! My God! Down there —in the dark—for ever and ever and ever! I could not bear to think of it! My Edward! And so I interfered . . . and prayed . . . and prayed till. . . . Oh! I am punished. Flesh and blood could not inherit! I kept him there—I would not let him go. . . . I kept him. . . . I prayed. . . . I denied him Christian burial. . . . Oh, how could I know. . . ."

"Good heavens, Alice!" said Graham, coming sensibly forward, "what does this mean? I have heard of schoolgirls going through the marriage service by themselves, but the burial service——"

He laid down his hat and went on severely, "What have you to do with such things? Your child is flourishing—your husband alive and here——"

"And who kept him here?" interrupted Alice Arne fiercely, accepting the fact of his appearance without comment.

"You did," he answered quickly, "with your care and tenderness. I believe the warmth of your body, as you lay beside him for that half-hour, maintained the vital heat during that extraordinary suspension of the heart's action, which made us all give him up for dead. You were his best doctor, and brought him back to us."

"Yes, it was I—it was I—you need not tell me it was I!"

"Come, be thankful!" he said cheerfully. "Put that book away, and give me some tea, I'm very cold."

"Oh, Dr. Graham, how thoughtless of me!" said Mrs. Arne, rallying at the slight imputation on her politeness he had purposely made. She tottered to the bell and rang it before he could anticipate her.

"Another cup," she said quite calmly to Foster, who answered it. Then she sat down quivering all over with the suddenness of the constraint put upon her.

"Yes, sit down and tell me all about it," said Dr. Graham good-humouredly, at the same time observing her with the closeness he gave to difficult cases.

"There is nothing to tell," she said simply, shaking her head, and futilely altering the position of the tea-cups on the tray. "It all happened years ago. Nothing can be done now. Will you have sugar?"

He drank his tea and made conversation. He talked to her of some Dante lectures she was attending; of some details connected with her child's Kindergarten classes. These subjects did

not interest her. There was a subject she wished to discuss, he could see that a question trembled on her tongue, and tried to lead up to it.

She introduced it herself, quite quietly, over a second cup. "Sugar, Dr. Graham? I forget. Dr. Graham, tell me, do you believe that prayers—wicked unreasonable prayers—are granted?"

He helped himself to another slice of bread and butter before answering.

"Well," he said slowly, "it seems hard to believe that every fool who has a voice to pray with, and a brain where to conceive idiotic requests with, should be permitted to interfere with the economy of the universe. As a rule, if people were long-sighted enough to see the result of their petitions, I fancy very few of us would venture to interfere."

Mrs. Arne groaned.

She was a good Churchwoman, Graham knew, and he did not wish to sap her faith in any way, so he said no more, but inwardly wondered if a too rigid interpretation of some of the religious dogmas of the Vicar of St. Adhelm's, her spiritual adviser, was not the clue to her distress. Then she put another question——

"Eh! What?" he said. "Do I believe in ghosts? I will believe you if you will tell me you have seen one."

"You know, Doctor," she went on, "I was always afraid of ghosts—of spirits—things unseen. I couldn't ever read about them. I could not bear the idea of some one in the room with me that I could not see. There was a text that always frightened me that hung up in my room: 'Thou, God, seest me!' It frightened me when I was a child, whether I had been doing wrong or not. But now," shuddering, "I think there are worse things than ghosts."

"Well, now, what sort of things?" he asked good-humouredly. "Astral bodies——?"

She leaned forward and laid her hot hand on his.

"Oh, Doctor, tell me, if a spirit—without the body we know it by—is terrible, what of a body"—her voice sank to a whisper, "a body—senseless—lonely—stranded on this earth—without a spirit?"

She was watching his face anxiously. He was divided between a morbid inclination to laugh and the feeling of intense discomfort provoked by this wretched scene. He longed to give the conversation a more cheerful turn, yet did not wish to offend her by changing it too abruptly.

"I have heard of people not being able to keep body and soul together," he replied at last, "but I am not aware that practically such a division of forces has ever been achieved. And if we could only accept the theory of the de-spiritualised body, what a number of antipathetic people now wandering about in the world it would account for!"

The piteous gaze of her eyes seemed to seek to ward off the blow of his misplaced jocularity. He left his seat and sat down on the couch beside her.

"Poor child! poor girl! you are ill, you are over-excited. What is it? Tell me," he asked her as tenderly as the father she had lost in early life might have done. Her head sank on his shoulder.

"Are you unhappy?" he asked her gently.

"Yes!"

"You are too much alone. Get your mother or your sister to come and stay with you."

"They won't come," she wailed. "They say the house is like a grave. Edward has made himself a study in the basement. It's an impossible room—but he has moved all his things in, and I can't—I won't go to him there. . . ."

"You're wrong. For it's only a fad," said Graham, "he'll tire of it. And you must see more people somehow. It's a pity my daughter is away. Had you any visitors to-day?"

"Not a soul has crossed the threshold for eighteen days."

"We must change all that," said the doctor vaguely. "Meantime you must cheer up. Why, you have no need to think of ghosts and graves—no need to be melancholy—you have your husband and your child——"

"I have my child—yes."

The doctor took hold of Mrs. Arne by the shoulder, and held her a little away from him. He thought he had found the cause of her trouble—a more commonplace one than he had supposed.

"I have known you, Alice, since you were a child," he said gravely. "Answer me! You love your husband, don't you?"

"Yes." It was as if she were answering futile prefatory questions in the witness-box. Yet he saw by the intense excitement in her eyes that he had come to the point she feared and yet desired to bring forward.

"And he loves you?"

She was silent.

"Well, then, if you love each other, what more can you want? Why do you say you have only your child in that absurd way?"

She was still silent, and he gave her a little shake.

"Tell me, have you and he had any difference lately? Is there any—coldness—any—temporary estrangement between you?"

He was hardly prepared for the burst of foolish laughter that proceeded from the demure Mrs. Arne as she rose and confronted him, all the blood in her body seeming for the moment to rush to her usually pale cheeks.

"Coldness! Temporary estrangement! If that were all! Oh, is every one blind but me? There is all the world between us!—all the difference between this world and the next!"

She sat down again beside the doctor and whispered in his ear, and her words were like a breath of hot wind from some Gehenna of the soul.

"Oh, Doctor, I have borne it for six years, and I must speak. No other woman could bear what I have borne, and yet be alive! And I loved him so; you don't know how I loved him! That was it—that was my crime——"

"Crime?" repeated the doctor.

"Yes, crime! It was impious, don't you see? But I have been punished. Oh, Doctor, you don't know what my life is! Listen! Listen! I must tell you. To live with a—— At first before I guessed when I used to put my arms round him, and he merely submitted—and then it dawned on me what I was kissing! It is enough to turn a living woman into stone—for I am living, though sometimes I forget it. Yes, I am a live woman, though I live in a grave. Think what it is!—to wonder every night if you will be alive in the morning, to lie down every night in an open grave—to smell death in every corner—every room—to breathe death—to touch it. . . ."

The portière in front of the door shook, a hoopstick parted it, a round white-clad bundle supported on a pair of mottled red legs peeped in, pushing a hoop in front of her. The child made no noise. Mrs. Arne seemed to have heard her, however. She slewed round violently as she sat on the sofa beside Dr. Graham, leaving her hot hands clasped in his.

"You ask Dolly," she exclaimed. "She knows it, too—she feels it."

"No, no, Alice, this won't do!" the doctor adjured her very low. Then he raised his voice and ordered the child from the room. He had managed to lift Mrs. Arne's feet and laid her full length on the sofa by the time the maid reappeared. She had fainted.

He pulled down her eyelids and satisfied himself as to certain facts he had up till now dimly apprehended. When Mrs. Arne's maid returned, he gave her mistress over to her care and proceeded to Edward Arne's new study in the basement.

"Morphia!" he muttered to himself, as he stumbled and faltered through gaslit passages, where furtive servants eyed him and scuttled to their burrows.

"What is he burying himself down here for?" he thought, "Is it to get out of her way? They *are* a nervous pair of them!"

. . . . . .

Arne was sunk in a large arm-chair drawn up before the fire. There was no other light, except a faint reflection from the gas-lamp in the road, striking down past the iron bars of the window that was sunk below the level of the street. The room was comfortless and empty, there was little furniture in it except a large bookcase at Arne's right hand and a table with a Tantalus on it standing some way off. There was a faded portrait in pastel of Alice Arne over the mantepiece, and beside it, a poor pendant, a pen and ink sketch of the master of the house. They were quite discrepant, in size and medium, but they appeared to look at each other with the stolid attentiveness of newly married people.

"Seedy, Arne?" Graham said.

"Rather, to-day. Poke the fire for me, will you?"

"I've known you quite seven years," said the doctor cheerfully, "so I presume I can do that. . . . There, now! . . . And I'll presume further—— What have we got here?"

He took a small bottle smartly out of Edward Arne's fingers and raised his eyebrows. Edward Arne had rendered it up agreeably; he did not seem upset or annoyed.

"Morphia. It isn't a habit. I only got hold of the stuff yesterday —found it about the house. Alice was very jumpy all day, and communicated her nerves to me, I suppose. I've none as a rule, but do you know, Graham, I seem to be getting them—feel things a good deal more than I did, and want to talk about them."

"What, are you growing a soul?" said the doctor carelessly, lighting a cigarette.

"Heaven forbid!" Arne answered equably. "I've done very well without it all these years. But I'm fond of old Alice, you know, in my own way. When I was a young man, I was quite different. I took things hardly and got excited about them. Yes,

excited. I was wild about Alice, wild! Yes, by Jove! though she has forgotten all about it."

"Not that, but still it's natural she should long for some little demonstration of affection now and then . . . and she'd be awfully distressed if she saw you fooling with that bottle of morphia! You know, Arne, after that narrow squeak you had of it five years ago, Alice and I have a good right to consider that your life belong to us!"

Edward Arne settled in his chair and replied, rather fretfully——

"All very well, but you didn't manage to do the job thoroughly. You didn't turn me out lively enough to please Alice. She's annoyed because when I take her in my arms, I don't hold her tight enough. I'm too quiet, too languid! . . . Hang it all, Graham, I believe she'd like me to stand for Parliament! . . . Why can't she let me just go along my own way? Surely a man who's come through an illness like mine can be let off parlour tricks? All this worry—it culminated the other day when I said I wanted to colonise a room down here, and did, with a spurt that took it out of me horribly,—all this worry, I say, seeing her upset and so on, keeps me low, and so I feel as if I wanted to take drugs to soothe me."

"Soothe!" said Graham. "This stuff is more than soothing if you take enough of it. I'll send you something more like what you want, and I'll take this away, by your leave."

"I really can't argue!" replied Arne. . . . "If you see Alice tell her you find me fairly comfortable and don't put her off this room. I really like it best. She can come and see me here, I keep a good fire, tell her. . . . I feel as if I wanted to sleep . . ." he added brusquely.

"You have been indulging already," said Graham softly. Arne had begun to doze off. His cushion had sagged down, the doctor stooped to rearrange it, carelessly laying the little phial for the moment in a crease of the rug covering the man's knees.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Arne in her mourning dress was crossing the hall as he came to the top of the basement steps and pushed open the swing door. She was giving some orders to Foster, the butler, who disappeared as the doctor advanced.

"You're about again," he said, "good girl!"

"Too silly of me," she said, "to be hysterical! After all these

years! One should be able to keep one's own counsel. But it is over now, I promise I will never speak of it again."

"We frightened poor Dolly dreadfully. I had to order her out like a regiment of soldiers."

"Yes, I know. I'm going to her now."

On his suggestion that she should look in on her husband first she looked askance.

"Down there!"

"Yes, that's his fancy. Let him be. He is a good deal depressed about himself and you. He notices a great deal more than you think. He isn't quite as apathetic as you describe him to be. . . . Come here!" He led her into the unlit dining-room a little way. "You expect too much, my dear. You do really! You make too many demands on the vitality you saved."

"What did one save him for?" she asked fiercely. She continued more quietly, "I know. I am going to be different."

"Not you," said Graham fondly. He was very partial to Alice Arne in spite of her silliness. "You'll worry about Edward till the end of the chapter. I know you. And"—he turned her round by the shoulder so that she fronted the light in the hall—"you elusive thing, let me have a good look at you. . . . Hum! Your eyes, they're a bit starey. . . ."

He let her go again with a sigh of impotence. Something must be done . . . soon . . . he must think. . . . He got hold of his coat and began to get into it. . . .

Mrs. Arne smiled, buttoned a button for him and then opened the front door, like a good hostess, a very little way. With a quick flirt of his hat he was gone, and she heard the clap of his brougham door and the order "Home."

. . . . . .

"Been saying good-bye to that thief Graham?" said her husband gently, when she entered his room, her pale eyes staring a little, her thin hand busy at the front of her dress. . . .

"Thief? Why? One moment! Where's your switch?"

She found it and turned on a blaze of light from which her husband seemed to shrink.

"Well, he carried off my drops. Afraid of my poisoning myself, I suppose?"

"Or acquiring the morphia habit," said his wife in a dull level voice, "as I have."

She paused. He made no comment. Then, picking up the little

phial Dr. Graham had left in the crease of the rug, she spoke——

"You are the thief, Edward, as it happens, this is mine."

"Is it? I found it knocking about: I didn't know it was yours. Well, will you give me some?"

"I will, if you like."

"Well, dear, decide. You know I am in your hands and Graham's. He was rubbing that into me to-day."

"Poor lamb!" she said derisively; "I'd not allow my doctor, or my wife either, to dictate to me whether I should put an end to myself, or not."

"Ah, but you've got a spirit, you see!" Arne yawned. "However, let me have a go at the stuff and then you put it on top of a wardrobe or a shelf, where I shall know it is, but never reach out to get it, I promise you."

"No, you wouldn't reach out a hand to keep yourself alive, let alone kill yourself," said she. "That is you all over, Edward."

"And don't you see that is why I did die," he said, with earnestness unexpected by her. "And then, unfortunately, you and Graham bustled up and wouldn't let Nature take its course. . . . I rather wish you hadn't been so officious."

"And let you stay dead," said she carelessly. "But at the time I cared for you so much that I should have had to kill myself, or commit suttee like a Bengali widow. Ah, well!"

She reached out for a glass half-full of water that stood on the low ledge of a bookcase close by the arm of his chair. . . . "Will this glass do? What's in it? Only water? How much morphia shall I give you? An overdose?"

"I don't care if you do, and that's a fact."

"It was a joke, Edward," she said piteously.

"No joke to me. This fag end of life I've clawed hold of, doesn't interest me. And I'm bound to be interested in what I'm doing or I'm no good. I'm no earthly good now. I don't enjoy life, I've nothing to enjoy it with—in here"—he struck his breast. "It's like a dull party one goes to by accident. All I want to do is to get into a cab and go home."

His wife stood over him with the half-full glass in one hand and the little bottle in the other. Her eyes dilated . . . her chest heaved. . . .

"Edward!" she breathed. "Was it all so useless?"

"Was what useless? Yes, as I was telling you, I go as one in a dream—a bad, bad dream, like the dreams I used to have when I overworked at college. I was brilliant, Alice, brilliant, do you

hear? At some cost, I expect! Now I hate people—my fellow creatures. I've left them. They come and go, jostling me, and pushing me, on the pavements as I go along, avoiding them. Do you know where they should be, really, in relation to me?"

He rose a little in his seat—she stepped nervously aside, made as if to put down the bottle and the glass she was holding, then thought better of it and continued to extend them mechanically.

"They should be over my head. I've already left them and their petty nonsense of living. They mean nothing to me, no more than if they were ghosts walking. Or perhaps it's I who am a ghost to them? . . . You don't understand it. It's because I suppose you have no imagination. You just know what you want and do your best to get it. You blurt out your blessed petition to your Deity and the idea that you're irrelevant never enters your head, sott, persistent, High Church thing that you are! . . ."

Alice Arne smiled, and balanced the objects she was holding. He motioned her to pour out the liquid from one to the other, but she took no heed; she was listening with all her ears. It was the nearest approach to the language of compliment, to anything in the way of loverlike personalities that she had heard fall from his lips since his illness. He went on, becoming as it were lukewarm to his subject——

"But the worst of it is that once break the cord that links you to humanity—it can't be mended. Man doesn't live by bread alone . . . or lives to disappoint you. What am I to you, without my own poor personality? . . . Don't stare so, Alice! I haven't talked so much or so intimately for ages, have I? Let me try and have it out. . . . Are you in any sort of hurry?"

"No, Edward."

"Pour that stuff out and have done. . . . Well, Alice, it's a queer feeling, I tell you. One goes about with one's looks on the ground like a man who eyes the bed he is going to lie down in, and longs for. Alice, the crust of the earth seems a barrier between me and my own place. I want to scratch the boardings with my nails and shriek something like this: 'Let me get down to you all, there where I belong!' It's a horrible sensation, like a vampire reversed! . . ."

"Is that why you insisted on having this room in the basement?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, I can't bear being upstairs, somehow. Here, with these barred windows and stone-cold floors . . . I can see the people's

feet walking above there in the street . . . one has some sort of illusion. . . ."

"Oh!" She shivered and her eyes travelled like those of a caged creature round the bare room and fluttered when they rested on the sombre windows imperiously barred. She dropped her gaze to the stone flags that showed beyond the oasis of Turkey carpet on which Arne's chair stood. . . . Then to the door, the door that she had closed on entering. It had heavy bolts, but they were not drawn against her, though by the look of her eyes it seemed she half imagined they were. . . .

She made a step forward and moved her hands slightly. She looked down on them and what they held . . . then changed the relative positions of the two objects and held the bottle over the glass. . . .

"Yes, come along!" her husband said. "Are you going to be all day giving it me?"

With a jerk, she poured the liquid out into a glass and handed it to him. She looked away—towards the door. . . .

"Ah, your way of escape!" said he, following her eyes. Then he drank, painstakingly.

The empty bottle fell out of her hands. She wrung them, murmuring——

"Oh, if I had only known!"

"Known what? That I should go near to cursing you for bringing me back?"

He fixed his cold eyes on her, as the liquid passed slowly over his tongue. . . .

"——Or that you would end by taking back the gift you gave?"

W. W. Jacobs

THE WELL

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I

Two men stood in the billiard-room of an old country house, talking. Play, which had been of a half-hearted nature, was over,

and they sat at the open window, looking out over the park stretching away beneath them, conversing idly.

"Your time's nearly up, Jem," said one at length; "this time six weeks you'll be yawning out your honeymoon and cursing the man—woman, I mean—who invented them."

Jem Benson stretched his long limbs in the chair and grunted in dissent.

"I've never understood it," continued Wilfred Carr, yawning. "It's not in my line at all; I never had enough money for my own wants, let alone for two. Perhaps if I were as rich as you, or Crœsus, I might regard it differently."

There was just sufficient meaning in the latter part of the remark for his cousin to forbear replying to it. He continued to gaze out of the window and to smoke slowly.

"Not being as rich as Crœsus—or you," resumed Mr. Carr, regarding him from beneath lowered lids, "I paddle my own canoe down the stream of Time, and tying it to my friends' door-posts, go in to eat their dinners."

"Quite Venetian," said Jem Benson, still looking out of the window. "It's not a bad thing for you, Wilfred, that you have the door-posts and dinners—and friends."

Mr. Carr grunted in his turn. "Seriously though, Jem," he said slowly, "you're a lucky fellow, a very lucky fellow. If there's a better girl above ground than Olive I should like to see her."

"Yes," said the other quietly.

"She's such an exceptional girl," continued Carr, staring out of the window. "She's so good and gentle. She thinks you are a bundle of all the virtues."

He laughed frankly and joyously, but the other man did not join him.

"Strong sense of right and wrong though," continued Carr, musingly. "Do you know, I believe that if she found out that you were not——"

"Not what?" demanded Benson, turning upon him fiercely. "Not what?"

"Everything that you are," returned his cousin, with a grin that belied his words. "I believe she'd drop you."

"Talk about something else," said Benson slowly; "your pleasantries are not always in the best taste."

Wilfred Carr rose, and taking a cue from the rack, bent over the board and practised one or two favourite shots. "The only

other subject I can talk about just at present is my own financial affairs," he said slowly, as he walked round the table.

"Talk about something else," said Benson again, bluntly.

"And the two things are connected," said Carr, and dropping his cue, he half sat on the table and eyed his cousin.

There was a long silence. Benson pitched the end of his cigar out of the window, and leaning back, closed his eyes.

"Do you follow me?" said Carr at length.

Benson opened his eyes and nodded at the window. "Do you want to follow my cigar?" he demanded.

"I should prefer to depart by the usual way for your sake," returned the other, unabashed. "If I left by the window all sorts of questions would be asked, and you know what a talkative chap I am."

"So long as you don't talk about my affairs," returned the other, restraining himself by an obvious effort, "you can talk yourself hoarse."

"I'm in a mess," said Carr slowly, "a devil of a mess. If I don't raise fifteen hundred pounds by this day fortnight, I may be getting my board and lodging free."

"Would that be any change?" questioned Benson.

"The quality would," retorted the other. "The address also would not be good. Seriously, Jem, will you let me have the fifteen hundred?"

"No," said the other simply.

Carr went white. "It's to save me from ruin," he said thickly.

"I've helped you till I'm tired," said Benson, turning and regarding him, "and it is all to no good. If you've got in a mess, get out of it. You should not be so fond of giving autographs away."

"It's foolish, I admit," said Carr deliberately. "I won't do so any more. By the way, I've got some to sell. You needn't sneer. They're not my own."

"Whose are they?" enquired the other.

"Yours."

Benson got up from his chair and crossed over to him. "What is this?" he asked quietly. "Blackmail?"

"Call it what you like," said Carr. "I've got some letters for sale, price fifteen hundred pounds. And I know a man who wants to buy them at that price for the mere chance of getting Olive from you. I'll give you first offer."

"If you've got any letters bearing my signature, you will be good enough to give them to me," said Benson very slowly.

"They're mine," said Carr lightly; "given to me by the lady you wrote them to. I must say that they are not all in the best possible taste."

His cousin reached forward suddenly, and catching him by the collar of his coat pinned him down on the table.

"Give me those letters," he breathed, sticking his face close to his cousin's.

"They're not here," said Carr, struggling. "I'm not a fool. Let me go, or I'll raise the price."

The other man raised him from the table in his powerful hands, apparently with the intention of dashing his head against it. Then suddenly his hold relaxed as an astonished-looking maid-servant entered the room with letters. Carr sat up hastily.

"That's how it was done," said Benson, for the girl's benefit, as he took the letters.

"I don't wonder at the other man making him pay for it then," said Carr blandly.

"You will give me those letters?" said Benson suggestively, as the girl left the room.

"At the price I mentioned, yes," said Carr, "but so sure as I'm a living man, if you lay your clumsy hands on me again, I'll double it. Now, I'll leave you for a time while you think it over."

He took a cigar from the box and lighting it carefully quitted the room. His cousin waited until the door had closed behind him, and then turning to the window sat there a fit of fury as silent as it was terrible.

The air was fresh and sweet from the park, heavy with the scent of new-mown grass. The fragrance of a cigar was now added to it, and glancing out he saw his cousin pacing slowly by. He rose and went to the door, and then, apparently altering his mind, returned to the window and watched the figure of his cousin as it moved slowly away into the moonlight. Then he rose again, and for a long time the room was empty.

. . . . . .

It was empty when Mrs. Benson came in some time later to say good-night to her son on her way to bed. She walked slowly round the table, and pausing at the window gazed from it in idle thought, until she saw the figure of her son advancing with rapid strides to the house. He looked up at the window.

"Good-night," said she.

"Good-night," said Benson, in a deep voice.

"Where is Wilfred?"

"Oh, he has gone," said Benson.

"Gone?"

"We had a few words; he was wanting money again, and I gave him a piece of my mind. I don't think we shall see him again."

"Poor Wilfred!" sighed Mrs. Benson. "He is always in trouble of some sort. I hope that you were not too hard upon him."

"No more than he deserved," said her son sternly. "Good-night."

II

The well, which had long ago fallen into disuse, was almost hidden by the thick tangle of undergrowth which ran riot at that corner of the old park. It was partly covered by the shrunken half of a lid, above which a rusty windlass creaked in company with the music of the pines when the wind blew strongly. The full light of the sun never reached it, and the ground surrounding it was moist and green when other parts of the park were gaping with the heat.

Two people, walking slowly round the park in the fragrant stillness of a summer evening, strayed in the direction of the well.

"No use going through this wilderness, Olive," said Benson, pausing on the outskirts of the pines and eyeing with some disfavour the gloom beyond.

"Best part of the park," said the girl briskly; "you know it's my favourite spot."

"I know you're very fond of sitting on the coping," said the man slowly, "and I wish you wouldn't. One day you will lean back too far and fall in."

"And make the acquaintance of Truth," said Olive lightly. "Come along."

She ran from him and was lost in the shadow of the pines, the bracken cracking beneath her feet as she ran. Her companion followed slowly, and emerging from the gloom saw her poised daintly on the edge of the well with her feet hidden in the rank grass and nettles which surrounded it. She motioned her companion to take a seat by her side, and smiled softly as she felt a strong arm passed about her waist.

"I like this place," said she, breaking a long silence, "it is so dismal—so uncanny. Do you know I wouldn't dare to sit here alone, Jem. I should imagine that all sorts of dreadful things were hidden behind the bushes and trees, waiting to spring out on me. Ugh!"

"You'd better let me take you in," said her companion tenderly; "the well isn't always wholesome, especially in the hot weather. Let's make a move."

The girl gave an obstinate little shake, and settled herself more securely on her seat.

"Smoke your cigar in peace," she said quietly. "I am settled here for a quiet talk. Has anything been heard of Wilfred yet?"

"Nothing."

"Quite a dramatic disappearance, isn't it?" she continued. "Another scrape, I suppose, and another letter for you in the same old strain: 'Dear Jem, help me out.'"

Jem Benson blew a cloud of fragrant smoke into the air, and holding his cigar between his teeth, brushed away the ash from his coat sleeve.

"I wonder what he would have done without you," said the girl, pressing his arm affectionately. "Gone under long ago, I suppose. When we are married, Jem, I shall presume upon the relationship to lecture him. He is very wild, but he has his good points, poor fellow."

"I never saw them," said Benson, with startling bitterness. "God knows, I never saw them."

"He is nobody's enemy but his own," said the girl, startled by this outburst.

"You don't know much about him," said the other shortly. "He was not above blackmail; not above ruining the life of a friend to do himself a benefit. A loafer, a cur and a liar!"

The girl looked up at him soberly but timidly, and took his arm without a word, and they both sat silent while evening deepened into night and the beams of the moon, filtering through the branches, surrounded them with a silver network. Her head sank up on his shoulder, till suddenly, with a sharp cry, she sprang to her feet.

"What was that?" she cried breathlessly.

"What was what?" demanded Benson, springing up and clutching her fast by the arm.

She caught her breath and tried to laugh. "You're hurting me, Jem."

His hold relaxed.

"What is the matter?" he asked gently. "What was it startled you?"

"I was startled," she said, slowly putting her hands on his shoulder. "I suppose the words I used just now are ringing in my ears, but I fancied that somebody behind us whispered, 'Jem, help me out.'"

"Fancy," repeated Benson, and his voice shook; "but these fancies are not good for you. You—are frightened—at the dark and the gloom of these trees. Let me take you back to the house."

"No, I'm not frightened," said the girl, re-seating herself. "I should never be really frightened of anything when you were with me, Jem. I'm surprised at myself for being so silly."

The man made no reply but stood, a strong, dark figure, a yard or two from the well, as though waiting for her to join him.

"Come and sit down, sir," cried Olive, patting the brickwork with her small white hand, "one would think that you did not like your company."

He obeyed slowly and took a seat by her side, drawing so hard at his cigar that the light of it shone upon his face at every breath. He passed his arm, firm and rigid as steel, behind her, with his hand resting on the brickwork beyond.

"Are you warm enough?" he asked tenderly, as she made a little movement.

"Pretty fair," she shivered; "one oughtn't to be cold at this time of the year, but there's a cold damp air comes up from the well."

As she spoke a faint splash sounded from the depths below, and for the second time that evening she sprang from the well with a little cry of dismay.

"What is it now?" he asked in a fearful voice. He stood by her side and gazed at the well, as though half expecting to see the cause of her alarm emerge from it.

"Oh, my bracelet," she cried in distress, "my poor mother's bracelet. I dropped it down the well."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson dully. "Your bracelet! The diamond one?"

"The one that was my mother's," said Olive. "Oh, we can get it back, surely. We must have the water drained off."

"Your bracelet!" repeated Benson stupidly.

"Jem," said the girl in terrified tones, "dear Jem, what is the matter?"

For the man she loved was standing regarding her with horror. The moon which touched it was not responsible for all the whiteness of the distorted face, and she shrank back in fear to the edge of the well. He saw her fear, and by a mighty effort regained his composure and took her hand.

"Poor little girl," he murmured, "you frightened me. I was not looking when you cried, and I thought that you were slipping from my arms, down—down——"

His voice broke, and the girl, throwing herself into his arms, clung to him convulsively.

"There, there," said Benson fondly, "don't cry, don't cry."

"To-morrow," said Olive, half laughing, half crying, "we will all come round the well with hook and line and fish for it. It will be quite a new sport."

"No, we must try some other way," said Benson. "You shall have it back."

"How?" asked the girl.

"You shall see," said Benson. "To-morrow morning at latest you shall have it back. Till then promise me that you will not mention your loss to anyone. Promise."

"I promise," said Olive wonderingly. "But why not?"

"It is of great value for one thing, and—but there—there are many reasons. For one thing, it is my duty to get it for you."

"Wouldn't you like to jump down for it?" she asked mischievously. "Listen."

She stooped for a stone and dropped it down.

"Fancy being where that is now," she said, peering into the blackness; "fancy going round and round like a mouse in a pail, clutching at the slimy sides, with the water filling your mouth, and looking up to the little patch of sky above."

"You had better come in," said Benson very quietly. "You are developing a taste for the morbid and horrible."

The girl turned, and taking his arm walked slowly in the direction of the house. Mrs. Benson, who was sitting in the porch, rose to receive them.

"You shouldn't have kept her out so long," she said chidingly; "where have you been?"

"Sitting on the well," said Olive, smiling, "discussing our future."

"I don't believe that place is healthy," said Mrs. Benson emphatically. "I really think it might be filled in, Jem."

"All right," said her son slowly. "Pity it wasn't filled in long ago."

He took the chair vacated by his mother as she entered the house with Olive, and with his hands hanging limply over the sides sat in deep thought. After a time he rose, and going upstairs to a room which was set apart for sporting requisites selected a sea fishing line and some hooks and stole softly downstairs again. He walked swiftly across the park in the direction of the well, turning before he entered the shadow of the trees to look back at the lighted windows of the house. Then, having arranged his line, he sat on the edge of the well and cautiously lowered it.

He sat with his lips compressed, occasionally looking about him in a startled fashion, as though he half expected to see something peering at him from the belt of trees. Time after time he lowered his line until at length in pulling it up he heard a little metallic tinkle against the side of the well.

He held his breath then, and forgetting his fears drew the line in inch by inch, so as not to lose its precious burden. His pulse beat rapidly, and his eyes were bright. As the line came slowly in he saw the catch hanging to the hook, and with a steady hand drew the last few feet in. Then he saw that instead of the bracelet he had hooked a bunch of keys.

With a faint cry he shook them from the hook into the water below, and stood breathing heavily. Not a sound broke the stillness of the night. He walked up and down a bit and stretched his great muscles, then he came back to the well and resumed his task.

For an hour or more the line was lowered without result. In his eagerness he forgot his fears, and with eyes bent down the well fished slowly and carefully. Twice the hook became entangled in something, and was with difficulty released. I caught a third time, and all his efforts failed to free it. Then he dropped the line down the well, and with head bent walked towards the house.

He went first to the stables at the rear, and then retiring to his room for some time paced restlessly up and down. Then without removing his clothes he flung himself upon the bed and fell into a troubled sleep.

III

Long before anybody else was astir he arose and stole softly downstairs. The sunlight was stealing in at every crevice, and

flashing in long streaks across the darkened rooms. The dining-room into which he looked struck chill and cheerless in the dark yellow light which came through the lowered blinds. He remembered that it had the same appearance when his father lay dead in the house; now, as then, everything seemed ghastly and unreal; the very chairs, standing as their occupants had left them the night before, seemed to be indulging in some dark communication of ideas.

Slowly and noiselessly he opened the hall door and passed into the fragrant air beyond. The sun was shining on the drenched grass and trees, and a slowly vanishing white mist rolled like smoke about the grounds. For a moment he stood, breathing deeply the sweet air of the morning, and then walked slowly in the direction of the stables.

The rusty creaking of a pump-handle and a spatter of water upon the red-tiled courtyard showed that somebody else was astir, and a few steps farther he beheld a brawny, sandy-haired man gasping wildly under severe self-infliction at the pump.

"Everything ready, George?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir," said the man, straightening up suddenly and touching his forehead. "Bob's just finishing the arrangements inside. It's a lovely morning for a dip. The water in that well must be just icy."

"Be as quick as you can," said Benson impatiently.

"Very good, sir," said George, burnishing his face harshly with a very small towel which had been hanging over the top of the pump. "Hurry up, Bob."

In answer to his summons, a man appeared at the door of the stable with a coil of stout rope over his arm and a large metal candlestick in his hand.

"Just to try the air, sir," said George, following his master's glance, "a well gets rather foul sometimes, but if a candle can live down it a man can."

His master nodded, and the man, hastily pulling up the neck of his shirt and thrusting his arms through his waistcoat, followed him as he led the way slowly to the well.

"Beg pardon, sir," said George, drawing up to his side, "but you are not looking over and above well this morning. If you'll let me go down I'd enjoy the bath."

"No, no," said Benson peremptorily.

"You ain't fit to go down, sir," persisted his follower. "I've never seen you look so before. Now, if——"

"Mind your business," said his master curtly.

George became silent, and the three walked with swinging strides through the long, wet grass to the well. Bob flung the rope on the ground, and at a sign from his master handed him the candlestick.

"Here's the line for it, sir," said Bob, fumbling in his pockets.

Benson took it from him and slowly tied it to the candlestick. Then he placed it on the edge of the well and, striking a match, lit the candle and began slowly to lower it.

"Hold hard, sir," said George quickly, laying his hand on his arm, "you must tilt it or the string'll burn through."

Even as he spoke the string parted and the candlestick fell into the water below.

Benson swore quietly.

"I'll soon get another," said George, starting up.

"Never mind, the well's all right," said Benson.

"It won't take a moment, sir," said the other, over his shoulder.

"Are you master here, or am I?" said Benson hoarsely.

George came back slowly, a glance at his master's face stopped the protest upon his tongue, and he stood by watching him sulkily as he sat on the well and removed his outer garments. Both men watched him curiously, as having completed his preparations he stood grim and silent with his hands by his side.

"I wish you'd let me go sir," said George, plucking up courage to address him. "You ain't fit to go, you've got a chill or something. I shouldn't wonder it's the typhoid. They've got it in the village bad."

For a moment Benson looked at him angrily, then his gaze softened. "Not this time, George," he said quietly. He took the looped end of the rope and placed it under his arms, and sitting down, threw one leg over the side of the well.

"How are you going about it, sir?" queried George, laying hold of the rope and signing to Bob to do the same.

"I'll call out when I reach the water," said Benson; "then pay out three yards more quickly so that I can get to the bottom."

"Very good, sir," answered both.

Their master threw the other leg over the coping and sat motionless. His back was turned towards the men as he sat with head bent, looking down the shaft. He sat for so long that George became uneasy.

"All right, sir?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Benson slowly. "If I tug at the rope, George, pull up at once. Lower away."

The rope passed steadily through their hands until a hollow cry from the darkness below and a faint splashing warned them that he had reached the water. They gave him three yards more, and stood with relaxed grasp and strained ears, waiting.

"He's gone under," said Bob in a low voice.

The other nodded, and moistening his huge palms took a firmer grip of the rope.

Fully a minute passed, and the men began to exchange uneasy glances. Then a sudden tremendous jerk followed by a series or feebler ones nearly tore the rope from their grasp.

"Pull!" shouted George, placing one foot on the side and hauling desperately. "Pull! pull! He's stuck fast; he's not coming; P—U—LL!"

In response to their terrific exertions the rope came slowly in, inch by inch, until at length a violent splashing was heard, and at the same moment a scream of unutterable horror came echoing up the shaft.

"What a weight he is!" panted Bob. "He's stuck fast or something. Keep still, sir; for heaven's sake, keep still."

For the taut rope was being jerked violently by the struggles of the weight at the end of it.

Both men with grunts and sighs hauled it in foot by foot.

"All right, sir," cried George cheerfully.

He had one foot against the well, and was pulling manfully; the burden was nearing the top. A long pull and a strong pull, and the face of a dead man with mud in the eyes and nostrils came peering over the edge. Behind it was the ghastly face of his master; but this he saw too late, for with a great cry George let go his hold of the rope and stepped back. The suddenness overthrew his assistant, and the rope tore through his hands. There was a frightful splash.

"You fool!" stammered Bob, and ran to the well helplessly.

"Run!" cried George. "Run for another line."

He bent over the coping and called eagerly down as his assistant sped back to the stables shouting wildly. His voice re-echoed down the shaft, but all else was silence.

Manuel Komroff

ANTS

Reprinted from *Juggler's Kiss* (Horace Liveright) by permission of the author.

It was fifteen years ago when Captain Smith came to me and said: "Let's form a company and get rich." I was willing, and so was Bobbie Burroughs, the quartermaster of our ship the *Fawn* of Boston.

At that time we were lying in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro just doing nothing. We had been there for six months and lord knows we might have been there yet if. . . Well anyway, Smith was an old fox and Bobbie Burroughs, the quartermaster, was his handy man. All their money had been used up buying tickets for some of the Spanish lotteries and their bunks were plastered with these colored papers that ran back for years and years. Never once did they draw a lucky number but it did not seem to matter for as soon as the lists were published the ticket would be pasted on the wall. They were proud of their failures, and always hopeful of the new tickets.

Captain Smith himself was a man of courage and vision. He could knock you down just as quick as look at you. In his own way he played fair but he stole rope from the ship and sold it in South America. Then there were other things he did too but that has nothing to do with our company. He was a big man and once you saw him you could never forget his face because it was not only pock-marked but was peppered with little blue dots as though it were tattooed. He told me once it came from a load of coal that his old captain shot at him. It seems some one had been stealing brass fittings from the clipper and the old captain got out his short-barreled shot gun and fixed up a load with powder, wads and half an ounce of rock salt mixed with crushed coal. It was his own private formula and Smith, who was then the cabin boy on the clipper, got the whole load square in the chest and face. This cured him of the habit of unscrewing brass fittings but the coal in the face left its little marks. That was why once you saw Captain Smith you could never forget him.

Anyway, we formed a company; just the three of us and Smith got out all the maps he could find and after looking them over he said: "All them places marked with blue pencil is fortune spots. Here is where the *Eldorado* sunk with nine hundred bars

of silver. Here is where the big pearls grow,—never worked in twenty years. Here two hundred miles inland the black natives got gold pots that they cook their soup in. In this place, never worked, the sponges are so thick that they brush against the sides of the ship, and so fine, hardly any sand,—the kind for ladies' baths,—what catches twenty dollars apiece in any market. Near this island there is a reef that looks just like a bunch of reeds and muck but if you dig under a bit you come to coral trees, whole trees of white and pink spotted coral, but they got mean natives on the island and you take some chance."

In this way he went on and on. Before we knew where we were going or what we would do we swore allegiance to each other and became partners in this company. I put in four hundred dollars against the two hundred that each of them had and our company was formed. The reason I had to put in double of their amounts was because they said that they had all the brains and all the plans and I therefore had to put in more money than either of them.

"What do you know about ants?" said Captain Smith to us one fine afternoon.

"Ants?" I replied in amazement. "The little fellows that get into the bread box? Why, there is nothing to know about them."

"Nothing to know? Why, you talk like a fool. Don't you know that they live in families and have towns and cities and go to war and take prisoners? Did you never hear that they have nursemaids for their little ones and keep cows and also that some of them plant seed and grow wheat? Have you never seen a sandy ant-hill with a kind of wild wheat growing around? Do you know that they have policemen and messengers and strong-arm squads? Say, man, what you don't know about ants will fill a big book!"

Then he got out the charts again and looked at the map of Brazil and marked a spot with a ring. "Here," he said, "is the great ant mountain. And here is where we make our fortune. The company can now begin operations. Big scale stuff only."

Captain Smith left the boat and took a two weeks' trip around the country. I was treasurer of this company and I passed out to him seventy-five dollars for expenses. He came back and said the bargain was complete and sealed and he had the papers all signed up with the government of Brazil. We sat down and read the contract. It was all plain enough. We the Fawn Company agreed to clear the Cara district of ants by a secret process

of extermination. This would open up for the government and farmers thousands and thousands of acres. We also agreed to accomplish this work within the coming six months and after due investigation if the work was done as stated in the contract, we the "Fawn Company" would receive from the Government of Brazil one million silver dollars as full payment for our work. But not one cent was to go to us until the work was done and duly inspected. This is how our contract read.

Then the three of us went down and consulted a doctor who vaccinated us against smallpox. Here is where Bobbie Burroughs came in. He was once a hospital orderly and could talk the doctor lingo. We showed him the map of the Cara district and explained our plan. The doctor said that it would take two weeks for him to get our stuff ready and that it would cost us one hundred dollars for the whole layout complete, only we were to supply the tin box in which to carry the smallpox germs.

In the meantime we wrote to a fellow up in Para to look around for some good strong ponies and other things necessary for the journey. When the tin box was filled with three trays of test tubes each containing gelatine covered with incubating bacilli of smallpox—and each tube was protected with cotton—we set out for Para. We also took with us, at the doctor's advice, four big bottles of powdered quinine, a bottle of iodine and a sack of powdered sulphur.

At Para we got five ponies and loading up two with our packs and shovels and canvas tents we mounted and started the journey south for Cara. According to the map we were to locate this land at four degrees south of the equator on about the forty-sixth meridian, but the map was a bit out of the way. When we had gone about three hundred miles, and climbing all the time, we at last came into the district of Cara. It was a strange sight to behold. Suddenly, like the ring on our map, the land was divided between green and brown. All vegetation ceased abruptly,—not even a blade of grass grew in this place. It was all stone, dirt and sand. Here and there the trunk of an old tree now dead stood like a totem pole in a desert. Nothing but stone and dirt—and ants. Millions of ants!

The ants were of the red variety that had a fine wasplike waist and some of the big ones were half as long as your fingers. Wherever you looked you saw little clusters and long lines of ants.

We soaked the legs of the ponies with kerosene and went on and on, headed for the old crater. It seems that the ants had

taken possession of the old dead volcano and according to the natives, who lived at the edge of this desolate country, their main nest was down the hollow chimney of the dead volcano. This was where we headed for. Here we were to break open the test tubes and infect a whole stream of ants, that were descending into the nest, with the smallpox bacilli. They would carry it in for us and death would follow.

On the first night all was well. Everything went according to plan. We sprayed the tent with kerosene. We sprayed the horses and the packs. We sprinkled a circular line of sulphur around the tent and one around the place where the horses were tied. It seems that ants do not like sulphur and will not cross a ridge of powdered sulphur. On the first night all was well.

The second day we climbed higher and higher. Every once in a while Captain Smith would look back down the barren valley and say: "Too cheap. We sold it to them too cheap. All that land will next year become green and fertile. Too cheap. We should have gotten more."

But now it was growing more and more difficult. The ants got into the packs, and into the long hairs at the joint over the hoofs of the ponies. They kept pawing the ground. The ants got up our legs and under the tightly laced leggings, they worked their way into our pockets and we found them even in the tobacco. They were all over. All over, excepting in the tin box; this was the prize they were going to get. We were acting only as messengers delivering the package to the door of their home.

In the evening we made a small fire out of some rags soaked in kerosene and cooked beans and meat which we ate with hard crackers. Bobbie Burroughs was kneeling on the ground watching a line of moving ants. Suddenly he started shouting out loud to them and making wild catcalls and terrible shrieks.

"What's wrong with you, Bobbie?" called Captain Smith. "Have you gone bugs?"

"I am experimenting something," he answered. "I want to find out if they can hear."

"I never thought of that," said the Captain, and in less than a minute we were all three of us on the mountainside shouting, calling, whistling and making all kinds of startling noises but the little moving insects did not ever once hesitate or stop at any noise. In the end we decided that they were stone deaf.

"Just like fish," said Bobbie.

"But they got long distance scent, and a thousand sides to each eye," remarked the Captain.

That night it was horrible. The kerosene and the sulphur seemed of little help. We had to untie the horses so as to allow them to roll on the ground. At one time all five of them were rolling on their backs with legs in the air. The sting and the bite of the big red ant was just like salt in a cut. We slapped them and brushed them off and kept standing up but it did not seem to help. We decided in the night that at the break of dawn we would make a dash for the top and to lighten our load, we were to leave the tanks of kerosene and provisions behind, as well as four of the horses. Only one pony would go along as far to the rocky top as we could get him, he was to carry the tin box and shovels and rope, in case we had to get down in. In fact we did not know what we would see when we got there.

We followed this plan and made an early morning dash for the top. When we got there the size of the crater was quite large, larger than it looked from below. It was at least fifty yards across and it went down suddenly but the inside was not very deep. A kind of yellow grass grew sparingly all over this place but if you looked closely you could see any number of holes as big as your arm all over the ground and black inside with busy ants. In some places they were only about a foot apart, at other places they were almost a yard, but the whole ground was covered like a sieve with holes. And each was alive.

We got the handle of the pick and put it down one of the holes but it went straight through to the very end. Captain Smith said he thought they went down a hundred or more yards before the real city was reached.

"Come on! Now for the medicine!" he cried.

We tore open the tin box and filling our pockets with the tubes, climbed down into the crater. The Captain sent Bobbie to the opposite side while he worked toward the right and I to the left. We broke the tubes over the holes and dropped the pieces down. I do not suppose we had more than forty or fifty little tubes apiece though we could have used many hundred and not infected each hole. Smith said it did not matter because the germ once loose would multiply like wildfire and he was certain that ramifications underground connected one tunnel with another.

We climbed out and sat on a rock at the edge of the crater. It was already noon and we untied the packages of food that we brought along. The poor pony was rolling in the dirt below us trying to crush or shake loose the crawling ants. In the distance we saw mile after mile of barren ground stretch before us. "Too

cheap!" the Captain cried. "Too cheap!" But we ate our lunch and rested. We all needed sleep and from time to time we closed our eyes in an attempt to doze but the pests about us kept getting up our legs and into the neck and sleeves of our shirts.

Suddenly the Captain turned about and cried, "My God! Holy Moses! Look at it! They have broke loose! Run for your lives and don't stop at anything!"

Behind us the crater was covered—full to the brim—with a sea of red ants. The tide rose so fast that you could see it go up and up, an inch at a time, and while we looked the level had reached the brim of the crater and was about to pour over. We waited for no more. We abandoned the pony and tools and everything and ran like we never had run before. The earth and stones rolled from under our feet.

"Keep going! Keep going!" yelled Captain Smith as we made for the camp. While it took a whole morning to climb to the top, it only took half an hour or less to get to the camp but here, alas, the horses were dead on the ground and covered from head to foot, so that not a single speck of the hide was visible, with a live layer of red ants. Only the hoofs showed through this unnatural blanket.

"Keep going! Keep going!" cried the Captain. "They have exits all over the place." In some places they were coming out of the holes right under our feet. The ground was alive.

We abandoned the camp, the tent, the dead horses, the foods, tools, maps, quinine, clothes,—all. We each of us grabbed a can of kerosene and opening it as we ran, poured the contents over our heads and everything. Behind us a dark surface kept pouring over the brim of the crater and into the valley.

We ran.

"Holy Smoke! Keep going," cried the Captain. "Keep going. They're all over."

We were soon out of breath but kept racing on. The stones of the barren hill that our feet loosened rolled after us and spurred us on. Ahead of us ants were pouring out of holes in the ground and from the distance it looked like small lakes. Its surface was alive and red. Behind us the mass poured out like a hot lava.

The lakes ahead of us grew larger and larger until in some places the edges kissed and overlapped. We were still on high ground and could survey the land ahead of us as we stumbled on and ran.

Now we had to pick and choose our course. It was growing

more difficult. We had to go around many of the pools of red insects.

"For the love of God! Keep going! Keep going!" cried the Captain.

And we did. But now we were winded and holding our sides, and panting for breath, staggering, stumbling. Falling forward and catching ourselves. Slapping our ears and necks and brushing our arms. Limping along with a skip and a little run and blowing out hot wind from our lungs. The kerosene on our bodies was soon washed away by perspiration.

We ran on.

Our knees began to shake and hurt from going downhill so rapidly. Soon all became very vague and distant. We did not see where we were going but it did not much matter as long as it was downhill.

The sun was already going low when we reached the edge of the woods where the fields were green and fertile. Here the natives were also on the run with their livestock being driven before them. But we could pay little attention to what was going on. We were now more dead than alive. We were bitten from head to foot.

We plunged into an old wooden trough filled with water by the side of a barn and splashed and rolled in the tank. And we still ran on.

The three of us found ourselves in a native hospital the next day where we were covered from head to foot with oils and zinc salve. But poisoning set into my leg and it was taken from me by the surgeon, who, I was told, did a very good job. A better job than we had done in attacking the ants. And the surgeon said that ants couldn't be infected with smallpox anyway.

At any rate, for reasons that you can well understand, we never got the million silver dollars from the Government of Brazil and were all happy to return to the *Fawn* which was still lying idle in the harbour. But that was my last trip with that boat. We parted in Boston.

"We still got our company," said Captain Smith, "and the company owns the maps where the world's fortune spots are plainly marked. We could get a small craft of our own,—I have a scheme,—and we could get rich."

"To hell with the company," said I, and hobbled off the boat.

J. S. Le Fanu

MR. JUSTICE HARBOTTLE

From *In a Glass Darkly.*

PROLOGUE

On this case Doctor Hesselius has inscribed nothing more than the words, "Harman's Report," and a simple reference to his own extraordinary Essay on "The Interior Sense, and the Conditions of the Opening thereof."

The reference is to Vol. I, Section 317, Note Z*. The note to which reference is thus made, simply says: "There are two accounts of the remarkable case of the Honourable Mr. Justice Harbottle, one furnished to me by Mrs. Trimmer, of Tunbridge Wells (June, 1805); the other at a much later date, by Anthony Harman, Esq. I much prefer the former; in the first place, because it is minute and detailed, and written, it seems to me, with more caution and knowledge; and in the next, because the letters from Dr. Hedstone, which are embodied in it, furnish matter of the highest value to a right apprehension of the nature of the case. It was one of the best declared cases of an opening of the interior sense, which I have met with. It was affected too, by the phenomenon, which occurs so frequently as to indicate a law of these eccentric conditions; that is to say, it exhibited what I may term, the contagious character of this sort of intrusion of the spirit-world upon the proper domain of matter. So soon as the spirit-action has established itself in the case of one patient, its developed energy begins to radiate, more or less effectually, upon others. The interior vision of the child was opened; as was, also, that of its mother, Mrs. Pyneweck; and both the interior vision and hearing of the scullery-maid, were opened on the same occasion. After-appearances are the result of the law explained in Vol. II, Section 17 to 49. The common centre of association, simultaneously recalled, unites, or *re*unites, as the case may be, for a period measured, as we see, in Section 37. The *maximum* will extend to days, the *minimum* is little more than a second. We see the operation of this principle perfectly displayed, in certain cases of lunacy, of epilepsy, of catalepsy, and of mania, of a peculiar and painful character, though unattended by incapacity of business."

The memorandum of the case of Judge Harbottle, which was

written by Mrs. Trimmer, of Tunbridge Wells, which Doctor Hesselius thought the better of the two, I have been unable to discover among his papers. I found in his escritoire a note to the effect that he had lent the Report of Judge Harbottle's case, written by Mrs. Trimmer, to Dr. F. Heyne. To that learned and able gentleman accordingly I wrote, and received from him, in his reply, which was full of alarms and regrets, on account of the uncertain safety of that "valuable MS.," a line written long since by Dr. Hesselius, which completely exonerated him, inasmuch as it acknowledged the safe return of the papers. The narrative of Mr. Harman, is therefore, the only one available for this collection. The late Dr. Hesselius, in another passage of the note that I have cited, says, "As to the facts (non-medical) of the case, the narrative of Mr. Harman exactly tallies with that furnished by Mrs. Trimmer." The strictly scientific view of the case would scarcely interest the popular reader; and, possibly, for the purposes of this selection, I should, even had I both papers to choose between, have preferred that of Mr. Harman, which is given, in full, in the following pages.

CHAPTER I

THE JUDGE'S HOUSE

Thirty years ago, an elderly man, to whom I paid quarterly a small annuity charged on some property of mine, came on the quarter-day to receive it. He was a dry, sad, quiet man, who had known better days, and had always maintained an unexceptionable character. No better authority could be imagined for a ghost story.

He told me one, though with a manifest reluctance; he was drawn into the narration by his choosing to explain what I should not have remarked, that he had called two days earlier than that week after the strict day of payment, which he had usually allowed to elapse. His reason was a sudden determination to change his lodgings, and the consequent necessity of paying his rent a little before it was due.

He lodged in a dark street in Westminster, in a spacious old house, very warm, being wainscoted from top to bottom, and furnished with no undue abundance of windows, and those fitted with thick sashes and small panes.

This house was, as the bills upon the windows testified, offered to be sold or let. But no one seemed to care to look at it.

A thin matron, in rusty black silk, very taciturn, with large, steady, alarmed eyes, that seemed to look in your face, to read what you might have seen in the dark rooms and passages through which you had passed, was in charge of it, with a solitary "maid-of-all-work" under her command. My poor friend had taken lodgings in this house, on account of their extraordinary cheapness. He had occupied them for nearly a year without the slightest disturbance, and was the only tenant, under rent, in the house. He had two rooms; a sitting-room and a bed-room with a closet opening from it, in which he kept his books and papers locked up. He had gone to his bed, having also locked the outer door. Unable to sleep, he had lighted a candle, and after having read for a time, had laid the book beside him. He heard the old clock at the stair-head strike one; and very shortly after, to his alarm, he saw the closet-door, which he thought he had locked, open stealthily, and a slight dark man, particularly sinister, and somewhere about fifty, dressed in mourning of a very antique fashion, such a suit as we see in Hogarth, entered the room on tip-toe. He was followed by an elder man, stout, and blotched with scurvy, and whose features, fixed as a corpse's, were stamped with dreadful force with a character of sensuality and villainy.

This old man wore a flowered silk dressing-gown and ruffles, and he remarked a gold ring on his finger, and on his head a cap of velvet, such as, in the days of perukes, gentlemen wore in undress.

This direful old man carried in his ringed and ruffled hand a coil of rope; and these two figures crossed the floor diagonally, passing the foot of this bed, from the closet door at the farther end of the room, at the left, near the window, to the door opening upon the lobby, close to the bed's head, at his right.

He did not attempt to describe his sensations as these figures passed so near him. He merely said, that so far from sleeping in that room again, no consideration the world could offer would induce him so much as to enter it again alone, even in the daylight. He found both doors, that of the closet, and that of the room opening upon the lobby, in the morning fast locked as he had left them before going to bed.

In answer to a question of mine, he said that neither appeared the least conscious of his presence. They did not seem to glide, but walked as living men do, but without any sound, and he felt

a vibration on the floor as they crossed it. He so obviously suffered from speaking about the apparitions, that I asked him no more questions.

There were in his description, however, certain coincidences so very singular, as to induce me, by that very post, to write to a friend much my senior, then living in a remote part of England, for the information which I knew he could give me. He had himself more than once pointed out that old house to my attention, and told me, though very briefly, the strange story which I now asked him to give me in greater detail.

His answer satisfied me; and the following pages convey its substance.

Your letter (he wrote) tells me you desire some particulars about the closing years of the life of Mr. Justice Harbottle, one of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas. You refer, of course, to the extraordinary occurrences that made that period of his life long after a theme for "winter tales" and metaphysical speculation. I happen to know perhaps more than any other man living of those mysterious particulars.

The old family mansion, when I revisited London, more than thirty years ago, I examined for the last time. During the years that have passed since then, I hear that improvement with its preliminary demolitions, has been doing wonders for the quarter of Westminster in which it stood. If I were quite certain that the house had been taken down, I should have no difficulty about naming the street in which it stood. As what I have to tell, however, is not likely to improve its letting value, and as I should not care to get into trouble, I prefer being silent on that particular point.

How old the house was, I can't tell. People said it was built by Roger Harbottle, a Turkey merchant, in the reign of King James I. I am not a good opinion upon such questions; but having been in it, though in its forlorn and deserted state, I can tell you in a general way what it was like. It was built of dark-red brick, and the door and windows were faced with stone that had turned yellow by time. It receded some feet from the line of the other houses in the street; and it had a florid and fanciful rail of iron about the broad steps that invited your ascent to the hall-door, in which were fixed, under a file of lamps among scrolls and twisted leaves, two immense "extinguishers," like the conical caps of fairies, into which, in old times, the

footmen used to thrust their flambeaux when their chairs or coaches had set down their great people, in the hall or at the steps, as the case might be. That hall is panelled up to the ceiling, and has a large fire-place. Two or three stately old rooms open from it at each side. The windows of these are tall, with many small panes. Passing through the arch at the back of the hall, you come upon the wide and heavy well-staircase. There is a back staircase also. The mansion is large, and has not as much light, by any means, in proportions to its extent, as modern houses enjoy. When I saw it, it had long been untenanted, and had the gloomy reputation beside of a haunted house. Cobwebs floated from the ceilings or spanned the corners of the cornices, and dust lay thick over everything. The windows were stained with the dust and rain of fifty years, and darkness had thus grown darker.

When I made it my first visit, it was in company with my father, when I was still a boy, in the year 1808. I was about twelve years old, and my imagination impressible, as it always is at that age. I looked about me with great awe. I was here in the very centre and scene of those occurrences which I had heard recounted at the fireside at home, with so delightful a horror.

My father was an old bachelor of nearly sixty when he married. He had, when a child, seen Judge Harbottle on the bench in his robes and wig a dozen times at least before his death, which took place in 1748, and his appearance made a powerful and unpleasant impression, not only on his imagination, but upon his nerves.

The Judge was at that time a man of some sixty-seven years. He had a great mulberry-coloured face, a big, carbuncled nose, fierce eyes, and a grim and brutal mouth. My father, who was young at the time, thought it the most formidable face he had ever seen; for there were evidences of intellectual power in the formation and lines of the forehead. His voice was loud and harsh, and gave effect to the sarcasm which was his habitual weapon on the bench.

This old gentleman had the reputation of being about the wickedest man in England. Even on the bench he now and then showed his scorn of opinion. He had carried cases his own way, it was said, in spite of counsel, authorities, and even of juries, by a sort of cajolery, violence, and bamboozling, that somehow confused and overpowered resistance. He had never actually committed himself; he was too cunning to do that. He had the

character of being, however, a dangerous and unscrupulous judge; but his character did not trouble him. The associates he chose for his hours of relaxation cared as little as he did about it.

CHAPTER II

MR. PETERS

One night during the session of 1746 this old Judge went down in his chair to wait in one of the rooms of the House of Lords for the result of a division in which he and his order were interested.

This over, he was about to return to his house close by, in his chair; but the night had become so soft and fine that he changed his mind, sent it home empty, and with two footmen, each with a flambeau, set out on foot in preference. Gout had made him rather a slow pedestrian. It took him some time to get through the two or three streets he had to pass before reaching his house.

In one of those narrow streets of tall houses, perfectly silent at that hour, he overtook, slowly as he was walking, a very singular-looking old gentleman.

He had a bottle-green coat on, with a cape to it, and large stone buttons, a broad-leafed low-crowned hat, from under which a big powdered wig escaped; he stooped very much, and supported his bending knees with the aid of a crutch-handled cane, and so shuffled and tottered along painfully.

"I ask your pardon, sir," said this old man, in a very quavering voice, as the burly Judge came up with him, and he extended his hand feebly towards his arm.

Mr. Justice Harbottle saw that the man was by no means poorly dressed, and his manner that of a gentleman.

The Judge stopped short, and said, in his harsh peremptory tones, "Well, sir, how can I serve you?"

"Can you direct me to Judge Harbottle's house? I have some intelligence of the very last importance to communicate to him."

"Can you tell it before witnesses?" asked the Judge.

"By no means; it must reach *his* ear only," quavered the old man earnestly.

"If that be so, sir, you have only to accompany me a few steps farther to reach my house, and obtain a private audience; for I am Judge Harbottle."

With this invitation the infirm gentleman in the white wig complied very readily; and in another minute the stranger stood in what was then termed the front parlour of the Judge's house, *tête-à-tête* with that shrewd and dangerous functionary.

He had to sit down, being very much exhausted, and unable for a little time to speak; and then he had a fit of coughing, and after that a fit of gasping; and thus two or three minutes passed, during which the Judge dropped his roquelaure on an arm-chair, and threw his cocked-hat over that.

The venerable pedestrian in the white wig quickly recovered his voice. With closed doors they remained together for some time.

There were guests waiting in the drawing-rooms, and the sound of men's voices laughing, and then of a female voice singing to a harpsichord, were heard distinctly in the hall over the stairs; for old Judge Harbottle had arranged one of his dubious jollifications, such as might well make the hair of godly men's heads stand upright for that night.

This old gentleman in the powdered white wig, that rested on his stooped shoulders, must have had something to say that interested the Judge very much; for he would not have parted on easy terms with the ten minutes and upwards which that conference filched from the sort of revelry in which he most delighted, and in which he was the roaring king, and in some sort the tyrant also, of his company.

The footman who showed the aged gentleman out observed that the Judge's mulberry-coloured face, pimples and all, were bleached to a dingy yellow, and there was the abstraction of agitated thought in his manner, as he bid the stranger good-night. The servant saw that the conversation had been of serious import, and that the Judge was frightened.

Instead of stumping upstairs forthwith to his scandalous hilarities, his profane company, and his great china bowl of punch—the identical bowl from which a bygone Bishop of London, good easy man, had baptised this Judge's grandfather, now clinking round the rim with silver ladles, and hung with scrolls of lemon-peel—instead, I say, of stumping and clambering up the great staircase to the cavern of his Circean enchantment, he stood with his big nose flattened against the window-pane, watching the progress of the feeble old man, who clung stiffly to the iron rail as he got down, step by step, to the pavement.

The hall-door had hardly closed, when the old Judge was in the hall bawling hasty orders, with such stimulating expletives as old colonels under excitement sometimes indulge in now-a-days, with a stamp or two of his big foot, and a waving of his clenched fist in the air. He commanded the footman to overtake the old gentleman in the white wig, to offer him his protection on his way home, and in no case to show his face again without having ascertained where he lodged, and who he was, and all about him.

"By ——, sirrah! If you fail me in this, you doff my livery to-night!"

Forth bounced the stalwart footman, with his heavy cane under his arm, and skipped down the steps, and looked up and down the street after the singular figure, so easy to recognise.

What were his adventures I shall not tell you just now.

The old man, in the conference to which he had been admitted in that stately panelled room, had just told the Judge a very strange story. He might be himself a conspirator; he might possibly be crazed; or possibly his whole story was straight and true.

The aged gentleman in the bottle-green coat, on finding himself alone with Mr. Justice Harbottle, had become agitated. He said,

"There is, perhaps you are not aware, my lord, a prisoner in Shrewsbury jail, charged with having forged a bill of exchange for a hundred and twenty pounds, and his name is Lewis Puneweck, a grocer of that town."

"Is there?" says the Judge, who knew well that there was.

"Yes, my lord," says the old man.

"Then you had better say nothing to affect this case. If you do, by —— I'll commit you! for I'm to try it," says the Judge, with his terrible look and tone.

"I am not going to do anything of the kind, my lord; of him or his case I know nothing, and care nothing. But a fact has come to my knowledge which it behoves you to well consider."

"And what may that fact be?" inquired the Judge; "I'm in haste, sir, and beg you will use dispatch."

"It has come to my knowledge, my lord, that a secret tribunal is in process of formation, the object of which is to take cognisance of the conduct of the judges; and first, of *your* conduct, my lord: it is a wicked conspiracy."

"Who are of it?" demands the Judge.

"I know not a single name as yet. I know but the fact, my lord; it is most certainly true."

"I'll have you before the Privy Council, sir," says the Judge.

"That is what I most desire; but not for a day or two, my lord."

"And why so?"

"I have not as yet a single name, as I told your lordship; but I expect to have a list of the most forward men in it, and some other papers connected with the plot, in two or three days."

"You said one or two just now."

"About that time, my lord."

"Is this a Jacobite plot?"

"In the main I think it is, my lord."

"Why, then it is political. I have tried no State prisoners, nor am like to try any such. How, then, doth it concern me?"

"From what I can gather, my lord, there are those in it who desire private revenges upon certain judges."

"What do they call their cabal?"

"The High Court of Appeal, my lord."

"Who are you, sir? What is your name?"

"Hugh Peters, my lord."

"That should be a Whig name?"

"It is, my lord."

"Where do you lodge, Mr. Peters?"

"In Thames Street, my lord, over against the sign of the 'Three Kings.'"

"'Three Kings'? Take care one be not too many for you, Mr. Peters! How come you, an honest Whig, as you say, to be privy to a Jacobite plot? Answer me that."

"My lord, a person in whom I take an interest has been seduced to take a part in it; and being frightened at the unexpected wickedness of their plans, he is resolved to become an informer for the Crown."

"He resolves like a wise man, sir. What does he say of the persons? Who are in the plot? Doth he know them?"

"Only two, my lord; but he will be introduced to the club in a few days, and he will then have a list, and more exact information of their plans, and above all of their oaths, and their hours and places of meeting, with which he wishes to be acquainted before they can have any suspicions of his intentions. And being so informed, to whom, think you, my lord, had he best go then?"

"To the king's attorney-general straight. But you say this concerns me, sir, in particular? How about this prisoner, Lewis Pyneweck? Is he one of them?"

"I can't tell, my lord; but for some reason, it is thought your lordship will be well advised if you try him not. For if you do, it is feared 'twill shorten your days."

"So far as I can learn, Mr. Peters, this business smells pretty strong of blood and treason. The king's attorney-general will know how to deal with it. When shall I see you again, sir?"

"If you give me leave, my lord, either before your lordship's court sits, or after it rises, to-morrow. I should like to come and tell your lordship what has passed."

"Do so, Mr. Peters, at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. And see you play me no trick, sir, in this matter; if you do, by ——, sir, I'll lay you by the heels!"

"You need fear no trick from me, my lord; had I not wished to serve you, and acquit my own conscience, I never would have come all this way to talk with your lordship."

"I'm willing to believe you, Mr. Peters; I'm willing to believe you, sir."

And upon this they parted.

"He has either painted his face, or he is consumedly sick," thought the old Judge.

The light had shone more effectually upon his features as he turned to leave the room with a low bow, and they looked, he fancied, unnaturally chalky.

"D—— him!" said the Judge ungraciously, as he began to scale the stairs: "he has half-spoiled my supper."

But if he had, no one but the Judge himself perceived it, and the evidence was all, as any one might perceive, the other way.

CHAPTER III

LEWIS PYNEWECK

In the meantime the footman dispatched in pursuit of Mr. Peters speedily overtook that feeble gentleman. The old man stopped when he heard the sound of pursuing steps, but any alarms that may have crossed his mind seemed to disappear on his recognising the livery. He very gratefully accepted the proffered assistance, and placed his tremulous arm within the servant's for support. They had not gone far, however, when the old man stopped suddenly, saying,

"Dear me! as I live, I have dropped it. You heard it fall. My eyes, I fear, won't serve me, and I'm unable to stoop low enough; but if *you* will look, you shall have half the find. It is a guinea; I carried it in my glove."

The street was silent and deserted. The footman had hardly descended to what he termed his "hunkers" and begun to search the pavement about the spot which the old man indicated, when Mr. Peters, who seemed very much exhausted, and breathed with difficulty, struck him a violent blow, from above over the back of the head with a heavy instrument, and then another; and leaving him bleeding and senseless in the gutter, ran like a lamplighter down a lane to the right, and was gone.

When, an hour later, the watchman brought the man in livery home, still stupid and covered with blood, Judge Harbottle cursed his servant roundly, swore he was drunk, threatened him with an indictment for taking bribes to betray his master, and cheered him with a perspective of the broad street leading from the Old Bailey to Tyburn, the cart's tail, and the hangman's lash.

Notwithstanding this demonstration, the Judge was pleased. It was a disguised "affidavit man," or footpad, no doubt, who had been employed to frighten him. The trick had fallen through.

A "court of appeal," such as the false Hugh Peters had indicated, with assassination for its sanction, would be an uncomfortable institution for a "hanging judge" like the Honourable Justice Harbottle. That sarcastic and ferocious administrator of the criminal code of England, at that time a rather pharisaical, bloody and heinous system of justice, had reasons of his own for choosing to try that very Lewis Pyneweck, on whose behalf this audacious trick was devised. Try him he would. No man living should take that morsel out of his mouth.

Of Lewis Pyneweck, of course, so far as the outer world could see, he knew nothing. He would try him after his fashion, without fear, favour, or affection.

But did he not remember a certain thin man, dressed in mourning, in whose house, in Shrewsbury, the Judge's lodgings used to be, until a scandal of his ill-treating his wife came suddenly to light? A grocer with a demure look, a soft step, and a lean face as dark as mahogany, with a nose sharp and long, standing ever so little awry, and a pair of dark steady brown eyes under thinly traced black brows—a man whose thin lips wore always a faint unpleasant smile.

Had not that scoundrel an account to settle with the Judge? had he not been troublesome lately? and was not his name Lewis Pyneweck, some time grocer in Shrewsbury, and now prisoner in the jail of that town?

The reader may take it, if he pleases, as a sign that Judge Harbottle was a good Christian, that he suffered nothing ever from remorse. That was undoubtedly true. He had, nevertheless, done this grocer, forger, what you will, some five or six years before, a grievous wrong; but it was not that but a possible scandal, and possible complications, that troubled the learned Judge now.

Did he not, as a lawyer, know, that to bring a man from his shop to the dock, the chances must be at least ninety-nine out of a hundred that he is guilty.

A weak man like his learned brother Withershins was not a judge to keep the high-roads safe, and make crime tremble. Old Judge Harbottle was the man to make the evil-disposed quiver, and to refresh the world with showers of wicked blood, and thus save the innocent, to the refrain of the ancient saw he loved to quote:

Foolish pity
Ruins a city.

In hanging that fellow he could not be wrong. The eye of a man accustomed to look upon the dock could not fail to read "villain" written sharp and clear in his plotting face. Of course he would try him, and no one else should.

A saucy-looking woman, still handsome, in a mob-cap gay with blue ribbons, in a saque of flowered silk, with lace and rings on, much too fine for the Judge's housekeeper, which nevertheless she was, peeped into his study next morning, and, seeing the Judge alone, stepped in.

"Here's another letter from him, come by the post this morning. Can't you do nothing for him?" she said wheedlingly, with her arm over his neck, and her delicate finger and thumb fiddling with the lobe of his purple ear.

"I'll try," said Judge Harbottle, not raising his eyes from the paper he was reading.

"I knew you'd do what I asked you," she said.

The Judge clapt his gouty claw over his heart, and made her an ironical bow.

"What," she asked, "will you do?"

"Hang him," said the Judge with a chuckle.

"You don't mean to; no, you don't, my little man," said she, surveying herself in a mirror on the wall.

"I'm d—d but I think you're falling in love with your husband at last!" said Judge Harbottle.

"I'm blest but I think you're growing jealous of him," replied the lady with a laugh. "But no; he was always a bad one to me; I've done with him long ago."

"And he with you, by George! When he took your fortune, and your spoons, and your ear-rings, he had all he wanted of you. He drove you from his house; and when he discovered you had made yourself comfortable, and found a good situation, he'd have taken your guineas, and your silver, and your ear-rings over again, and then allowed you half-a-dozen years more to make a new harvest for his mill. You don't wish him good; if you say you do, you lie."

She laughed a wicked, saucy laugh, and gave the terrible Rhadamanthus a playful tap on the chops.

"He wants me to send him money to fee a counsellor," she said, while her eyes wandered over the pictures on the wall, and back again to the looking-glass; and certainly she did not look as if his jeopardy troubled her very much.

"Confound his impudence, the *scoundrel*!" thundered the old Judge, throwing himself back in his chair, as he used to do *in furore* on the bench, and the lines of his mouth looked brutal, and his eyes ready to leap from their sockets. "If you answer his letter from my house to please yourself, you'll write your next from somebody else's to please me. You understand, my pretty witch, I'll not be pestered. Come, no pouting; whimpering won't do. You don't care a brass farthing for the villain, body or soul. You came here but to make a row. You are one of Mother Carey's chickens; and where you come, the storm is up. Get you gone, baggage! get you *gone*!" he repeated, with a stamp; for a knock at the hall-door made her instantaneous disappearance indispensable.

I need hardly say that the venerable Hugh Peters did not appear again. The Judge never mentioned him. But oddly enough, considering how he laughed to scorn the weak invention which he had blown into dust at the very first puff, his white-wigged visitor and the conference in the dark front parlour was often in his memory.

His shrewd eye told him that allowing for change of tints and

such disguises as the playhouse affords every night, the features of this false old man, who had turned out too hard for his tall footman, were identical with those of Lewis Pyneweck.

Judge Harbottle made his register call upon the crown solicitor, and tell him that there was a man in town who bore a wonderful resemblance to a prisoner in Shrewsbury jail named Lewis Pyneweck, and to make inquiry through the post forthwith whether any one was personating Pyneweck in prison, and whether he had thus or otherwise made his escape.

The prisoner was safe, however, and no question as to his identity.

CHAPTER IV

INTERRUPTION IN COURT

In due time Judge Harbottle went circuit; and in due time the judges were in Shrewsbury. News travelled slowly in those days, and newspapers, like the wagons and stage-coaches, took matters easily. Mrs. Pyneweck, in the Judge's house, with a diminished household—the greater part of the Judge's servants having gone with him, for he had given up riding circuit, and travelled in his coach in state—kept house rather solitarily at home.

In spite of quarrels, in spite of mutual injuries—some of them, inflicted by herself, enormous—in spite of a married life of spited bickerings—a life in which there seemed no love or liking or forbearance, for years—now that Pyneweck stood in near danger of death, something like remorse came suddenly upon her. She knew that in Shrewsbury were transacting the scenes which were to determine his fate. She knew she did not love him; but she could not have supposed, even a fortnight before, that the hour of suspense could have affected her so powerfully.

She knew the day on which the trial was expected to take place. She could not get it out of her head for a minute; she felt faint as it drew towards evening.

Two or three days passed; and then she knew that the trial must be over by this time. There were floods between London and Shrewsbury, and news was long delayed. She wished the floods would last for ever. It was dreadful waiting to hear; dreadful to know that the event was over, and that she could not hear till self-willed rivers subsided; dreadful to know that they must subside and the news come at last.

She had some vague trust in the Judge's good-nature, and much in the resources of chance and accident. She had contrived to send the money he wanted. He would not be without legal advice and energetic and skilled support.

At last the news did come—a long arrear all in a gush: a letter from a female friend in Shrewsbury; a return of the sentences, sent up for the Judge; and most important, because most easily got at, being told with great aplomb and brevity, the long-deferred intelligence of the Shrewsbury Assizes in the *Morning Advertiser*. Like an impatient reader of a novel, who reads the last page first, she read with dizzy eyes the list of the executions.

Two were respited, seven were hanged; and in that capital catalogue was this line:

"Lewis Pyneweck—forgery."

She had to read it half-a-dozen times over before she was sure she understood it. Here was the paragraph:

"Sentence, Death—7.
"Executed accordingly, on Friday the 13th instant, to wit:
"Thomas Primer, *alias* Duck—highway robbery.
"Flora Guy—stealing to the value of 11*s.* 6*d.*
"Arthur Pounden—burglary.
"Matilda Mummery—riot.
"Lewis Pyneweck—forgery, bill of exchange."

And when she reached this, she read it over and over, feeling very cold and sick.

This buxom housekeeper was known in the house as Mrs. Carwell—Carwell being her maiden name, which she had resumed.

No one in the house except its master knew her history. Her introduction had been managed craftily. No one suspected that it had been concerted between her and the old reprobate in scarlet and ermine.

Flora Carwell ran up the stairs now, and snatched her little girl, hardly seven years of age, whom she met on the lobby, hurriedly up in her arms, and carried her into her bedroom, without well knowing what she was doing, and sat down, placing the child before her. She was not able to speak. She held the child before her, and looked in the little girl's wondering face, and burst into tears of horror.

She thought the Judge could have saved him. I daresay he

could. For a time she was furious with him, and hugged and kissed her bewildered little girl, who returned her gaze with large round eyes.

The little girl had lost her father, and knew nothing of the matter. She had been always told that her father was dead long ago.

A woman, coarse, uneducated, vain, and violent, does not reason, or even feel, very distinctly; but in these tears of consternation were mingling a self-upbraiding. She felt afraid of that little child.

But Mrs. Carwell was a person who lived not upon sentiment, but upon beef and pudding; she consoled herself with punch; she did not trouble herself long even with resentments; she was a gross and material person, and could not mourn over the irrevocable for more than a limited number of hours, even if she would.

Judge Harbottle was soon in London again. Except the gout, this savage old epicurean never knew a day's sickness. He laughed, and coaxed, and bullied away the young woman's faint upbraidings, and in a little time Lewis Pyneweck troubled her no more; and the Judge secretly chuckled over the perfectly fair removal of a bore, who might have grown little by little into something very like a tyrant.

It was the lot of the Judge whose adventures I am now recounting to try criminal cases at the Old Bailey shortly after his return. He had commenced his charge to the jury in a case of forgery, and was, after his wont, thundering dead against the prisoner, with many a hard aggravation and cynical gibe, when suddenly all died away in silence, and, instead of looking at the jury, the eloquent Judge was gaping at some person in the body of the court.

Among the persons of small importance who stand and listen at the sides was one tall enough to show with a little prominence; a slight mean figure, dressed in seedy black, lean and dark of visage. He had just handed a letter to the crier, before he caught the Judge's eye.

That Judge descried, to his amazement, the features of Lewis Pyneweck. He had the usual faint thin-lipped smile; and with his blue chin raised in air, and as it seemed quite unconscious of the distinguishing notice he has attracted, he was stretching his low cravat with his crooked fingers, while he slowly turned his head from side to side—a process which enabled the Judge to see

distinctly a stripe of swollen blue round his neck, which indicated, he thought, the grip of the rope.

This man, with a few others, had got a footing on a step, from which he could better see the court. He now stepped down, and the Judge lost sight of him.

His lordship signed energetically with his hand in the direction in which this man had vanished. He turned to the tipstaff. His first effort to speak ended in a gasp. He cleared his throat, and told the astounded official to arrest that man who had interrupted the court.

"He's but this moment gone down *there*. Bring him in custody before me, within ten minutes' time, or I'll strip your gown from your shoulders and fine the sheriff!" he thundered, while his eyes flashed round the court in search of the functionary.

Attorneys, counsellors, idle spectators, gazed in the direction in which Mr. Justice Harbottle had shaken his gnarled old hand. They compared notes. Not one had seen any one making a disturbance. They asked one another if the Judge was losing his head.

Nothing came of the search. His lordship concluded his charge a great deal more tamely; and when the jury retired, he stared round the court with a wandering mind, and looked as if he would not have given sixpence to see the prisoner hanged.

CHAPTER V

CALEB SEARCHER

The Judge had received the letter; had he known from whom it came, he would no doubt have read it instantaneously. As it was he simply read the direction:

To the Honourable
The Lord Justice
Elijah Harbottle,
One of his Majesty's Justices of
the Honourable Court of Common Pleas.

It remained forgotten in his pocket till he reached home.

When he pulled out that and others from the capacious pocket of his coat, it had its turn, as he sat in his library in his thick silk dressing-gown; and then he found its contents to be a closely-written letter, in a clerk's hand, and an enclosure in

"secretary hand," as I believe the angular scrivinary of law-writing in those days was termed, engrossed on a bit of parchment about the size of this page. The letter said:

"MR. JUSTICE HARBOTTLE,—MY LORD,

"I am ordered by the High Court of Appeal to acquaint your lordship, in order to your better preparing yourself for your trial, that a true bill hath been sent down, and the indictment lieth against your lordship for the murder of one Lewis Pyneweck of Shrewsbury, citizen, wrongfully executed for the forgery of a bill of exchange, on the —th day of —— last, by reason of the wilful perversion of the evidence, and the undue pressure put upon the jury, together with the illegal admission of evidence by your lordship, well knowing the same to be illegal, by all which the promoter of the prosecution of the said indictment, before the High Court of Appeal, hath lost his life.

"And the trial of the said indictment, I am farther ordered to acquaint your lordship, is fixed for the 10th day of —— next ensuing, by the right honourable the Lord Chief Justice Twofold, of the court aforesaid, to wit, the High Court of Appeal, on which day it will most certainly take place. And I am farther to acquaint your lordship, to prevent any surprise or miscarriage, that your case stands first for the said day, and that the said High Court of Appeal sits day and night, and never rises; and herewith, by order of the said court, I furnish your lordship with a copy (extract) of the record in this case, except of the indictment, whereof, notwithstanding, the substance and effect is supplied to your lordship in this Notice. And farther I am to inform you, that in case the jury then to try your lordship should find you guilty, the right honourable the Lord Chief Justice will, in passing sentence of death upon you, fix the day of execution for the 10th day of ——, being one calendar month from the day of your trial."

It was signed by "CALEB SEARCHER,
"Officer of the Crown Solicitor in the Kingdom of Life and Death."

The Judge glanced through the parchment.

"'Sblood! Do they think a man like me is to be bamboozled by their buffoonery?"

The Judge's coarse features were wrung into one of his sneers; but he was pale. Possibly, after all, there was a conspiracy on foot. It was queer. Did they mean to pistol him in his carriage? or did they only aim at frightening him?

Judge Harbottle had more than enough of animal courage. He was not afraid of highwaymen, and he had fought more than

his share of duels, being a foul-mouthed advocate while he held briefs at the bar. No one questioned his fighting qualities. But with respect to this particular case of Pyneweck, he lived in a house of glass. Was there not his pretty, dark-eyed, over-dressed housekeeper, Mrs. Flora Carwell? Very easy for people who knew Shrewsbury to identify Mrs. Pyneweck, if once put upon the scent; and had he not stormed and worked hard in that case? Had he not made it hard sailing for the prisoner? Did he not know very well what the bar thought of it? It would be the worst scandal that ever blasted Judge.

So much there was intimidating in the matter but nothing more. The Judge was a little bit gloomy for a day or two after, and more testy with every one than usual.

He locked up the papers; and about a week after he asked his housekeeper, one day, in the library:

"Had your husband never a brother?"

Mrs. Carwell squalled on this sudden introduction of the funereal topic, and cried exemplary "piggins full" as the Judge used pleasantly to say. But he was in no mood for trifling now, and he said sternly:

"Come madam! this wearies me. Do it another time; and give me an answer to my question." So she did.

Pyneweck had no brother living. He once had one; but he died in Jamaica.

"How do you know he is dead?" asked the Judge.

"Because he told me so."

"Not the dead man."

"Pyneweck told me so."

"Is that all?" sneered the Judge.

He pondered this matter; and time went on. The Judge was growing a little morose, and less enjoying. The subject struck nearer to his thoughts than he fancied it could have done. But so it is with most indivulged vexations, and there was no one to whom he could tell this one.

It was now the ninth; and Mr. Justice Harbottle was glad. He knew nothing would come of it. Still it bothered him; and to-morrow would see it well over.

[What of the paper I have cited? No one saw it during his life; no one, after his death. He spoke of it to Dr. Hedstone; and what purported to be "a copy," in the old Judge's handwriting, was found. The original was nowhere. Was it a copy of an illusion, incident to brain disease? Such is my belief.]

CHAPTER VI

ARRESTED

Judge Harbottle went this night to the play at Drury Lane. He was one of those old fellows who care nothing for late hours, and occasional knocking about in pursuit of pleasure. He had appointed with two cronies of Lincoln's Inn to come home in his coach with him to sup after the play.

They were not in his box, but were to meet him near the entrance, and get into his carriage there; and Mr. Justice Harbottle, who hated waiting, was looking a little impatiently from the window.

The judge yawned.

He told the footman to watch for Counsellor Thavies and Counsellor Beller, who were coming; and, with another yawn, he laid his cocked hat on his knees, closed his eyes, leaned back in his corner, wrapped his mantle closer about him, and began to think of pretty Mrs. Abington.

And being a man who could sleep like a sailor, at a moment's notice, he was thinking of taking a nap. Those fellows had no business to keep a judge waiting.

He heard their voices now. Those rake-hell counsellors were laughing, and bantering, and sparring after their wont. The carriage swayed and jerked, as one got in, and then again as the other followed. The door clapped, and the coach was now jogging and rumbling over the pavement. The Judge was a little bit sulky. He did not care to sit up and open his eyes. Let them suppose he was asleep. He heard them laugh with more malice than good-humour, he thought, as they observed it. He would give them a d—d hard knock or two when they got to his door, and till then he would counterfeit his nap.

The clocks were chiming twelve. Beller and Thavies were silent as tombstones. They were generally loquacious and merry rascals.

The Judge suddenly felt himself roughly seized and thrust from his corner into the middle of the seat, and opening his eyes, instantly he found himself between his two companions.

Before he could blurt out the oath that was at his lips, he saw that they were two strangers—evil-looking fellows, each with a pistol in his hand, and dressed like Bow Street officers.

The Judge clutched at the check-string. The coach pulled up. He stared about him. They were not among houses; but through

the windows, under a broad moonlight, he saw a black moor stretching lifelessly from right to left, with rotting trees, pointing fantastic branches in the air, standing here and there in groups, as if they held up their arms and twigs like fingers, in horrible glee at the Judge's coming.

A footman came to the window. He knew his long face and sunken eyes. He knew it was Dingly Chuff, fifteen years ago a footman in his service, whom he had turned off at a moment's notice, in a burst of jealousy, and indicted for a missing spoon. The man had died in prison of the jail-fever.

The Judge drew back in utter amazement. His armed companions signed mutely; and they were again gliding over this unknown moor.

The bloated and gouty old man, in his horror considered the question of resistance. But his athletic days were long over. This moor was a desert. There was no help to be had. He was in the hands of strange servants, even if his recognition turned out to be a delusion, and they were under the command of his captors. There was nothing for it but submission, for the present.

Suddenly the coach was brought nearly to a standstill, so that the prisoner saw an ominous sight from the window.

It was a gigantic gallows beside the road; it stood three-sided, and from each of its three broad beams at top depended in chains some eight or ten bodies, from several of which the cere-clothes had dropped away, leaving the skeletons swinging slightly by their chains. A tall ladder reached to the summit of the structure, and on the peat beneath lay bones.

On top of the dark transverse beam facing the road, from which, as from the other two completing the triangle of death, dangled a row of these unfortunates in chains, a hangman, with a pipe in his mouth, much as we see him in the famous print of the "Idle Apprentice," though here his perch was ever so much higher, was reclining at his ease and listlessly shying bones, from a little heap at his elbow, at the skeletons that hung round, bringing down now a rib or two, now a hand, now half a leg. A long-sighted man could have discerned that he was a dark fellow, lean; and from continually looking down on the earth from the elevation over which, in another sense, he always hung, his nose, his lips, his chin were pendulous and loose, and drawn down into a monstrous grotesque.

This fellow took his pipe from his mouth on seeing the coach, stood up, and cut some solemn capers high on his beam, and

shook a new rope in the air, crying with a voice high and distant as the caw of a raven hovering over a gibbet, "A rope for Judge Harbottle!"

The coach was now driving on at its old swift pace.

So high a gallows as that, the Judge had never, even in his most hilarious moments, dreamed of. He thought he must be raving. And the dead footman! He shook his ears and strained his eyelids; but if he was dreaming, he was unable to awake himself.

There was no good in threatening these scoundrels. A *brutum fulmen* might bring a real one on his head.

Any submission to get out of their hands; and then heaven and earth he would move to unearth and hunt them down.

Suddenly they drove round a corner of a vast white building, and under a *porte-cochère*.

CHAPTER VII

CHIEF-JUSTICE TWOFOLD

The Judge found himself in a corridor lighted with dingy oil lamps, the walls of bare stone; it looked like a passage in a prison. His guards placed him in the hands of other people. Here and there he saw bony and gigantic soldiers passing to and fro, with muskets over their shoulders. They looked straight before them, grinding their teeth, in bleak fury, with no noise but the clank of their shoes. He saw these by glimpses, round corners, and at the ends of passages, but he did not actually pass them by.

And now, passing under a narrow doorway, he found himself in the dock, confronting a judge in his scarlet robes, in a large court-house. There was nothing to elevate this Temple of Themis above its vulgar kind elsewhere. Dingy enough it looked, in spite of candles lighted in decent abundance. A case had just closed, and the last juror's back was seen escaping through the door in the wall of the jury-box. There were some dozen barristers, some fiddling with pen and ink, others buried in briefs, some beckoning, with the plumes of their pens, to their attorneys, of whom there were no lack; there were clerks to-ing and fro-ing, and the officers of the court, and the registrar, who was handing up a paper to the judge; and the tipstaff, who was presenting a note at the end of his wand to a king's counsel over the heads of the crowd between. If this was the High Court of Appeal, which

never rose day or night, it might account for the pale and jaded aspect of everybody in it. An air of indescribable gloom hung upon the pallid features of all the people here; no one ever smiled; all looked more or less secretly suffering.

"The King against Elijah Harbottle!" shouted the officer.

"Is the appellant Lewis Pyneweck in court?" asked Chief-Justice Twofold, in a voice of thunder, that shook the woodwork of the court, and boomed down the corridors.

Up stood Pyneweck from his place at the table.

"Arraign the prisoner!" roared the Chief: and Judge Harbottle felt the panels of the dock round him, and the floor, and the rails quiver in the vibrations of that tremendous voice.

The prisoner, *in limine,* objected to this pretended court, as being a sham, and non-existent in point of law; and then, that, even if it were a court constituted by law (the Judge was growing dazed), it had not and could not have any jurisdiction to try him for his conduct on the bench.

Whereupon the chief-justice laughed suddenly, and every one in court, turning round upon the prisoner, laughed also, till the laugh grew and roared all round like a deafening acclamation; he saw nothing but glittering eyes and teeth, a universal stare and grin; but though all the voices laughed, not a single face of all those that concentrated their gaze upon him looked like a laughing face. The mirth subsided as suddenly as it began.

The indictment was read. Judge Harbottle actually pleaded! He pleaded "Not Guilty." A jury were sworn. The trial proceeded. Judge Harbottle was bewildered. This could not be real. He must be either mad, or *going* mad, he thought.

One thing could not fail to strike even him. This Chief-Justice Twofold, who was knocking him about at every turn with sneer and gibe, and roaring him down with his tremendous voice, was a dilated effigy of himself; an image of Mr. Justice Harbottle, at least double his size, and with all his fierce colouring, and his ferocity of eye and visage, enhanced awfully.

Nothing the prisoner could argue, cite, or state, was permitted to retard for a moment the march of the case towards its catastrophe.

The chief-justice seemed to feel his power over the jury, and to exult and riot in the display of it. He glared at them, he nodded to them; he seemed to have established an understanding with them. The lights were faint in that part of the court. The jurors were mere shadows, sitting in rows; the prisoner could see a

dozen pair of white eyes shining, coldly, out of the darkness; and whenever the judge in his charge, which was contemptuously brief, nodded and grinned and gibed, the prisoner could see, in the obscurity, by the dip of all these rows of eyes together, that the jury nodded in acquiescence.

And now the charge was over, the huge chief-justice leaned back panting and gloating on the prisoner. Every one in the court turned about, and gazed with steadfast hatred on the man in the dock. From the jury-box where the twelve sworn brethren were whispering together, a sound in the general stillness like a prolonged "hiss-s-s!" was heard; and then, in answer to the challenge of the officer, "How say you, gentlemen of the jury, guilty or not guilty?" came in a melancholy voice the finding, "Guilty."

The place seemed to the eyes of the prisoner to grow gradually darker and darker, till he could discern nothing distinctly but the lumen of the eyes that were turned upon him from every bench and side and corner and gallery of the building. The prisoner doubtless thought that he had quite enough to say, and conclusive, why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon him; but the lord chief-justice puffed it contemptuously away, like so much smoke, and proceeded to pass sentence of death upon the prisoner, having named the tenth of the ensuing month for his execution.

Before he had recovered the stun of this ominous farce, in obedience to the mandate, "Remove the prisoner," he was led from the dock. The lamps seemed all to have gone out, and there were stoves and charcoal fires here and there, that threw a faint crimson light on the walls of the corridors through which he passed. The stones that composed them looked now enormous, cracked and unhewn.

He came into a vaulted smithy, where two men, naked to the waist, with heads like bulls, round shoulders, and the arms of giants, were welding red-hot chains together with hammers that pelted like thunderbolts.

They looked on the prisoner with fierce red eyes, and rested their hammers for a minute; and said the elder to his companion, "Take out Elijah Harbottle's gyves"; and with a pincers he plucked the end which lay dazzling in the fire from the furnace.

"One end locks," said he, taking the cool end of the iron in one hand, while with the grip of a vice he seized the leg of the Judge, and locked the ring round his ankle. "The other," he said with a grin, "is welded."

The iron band that was to form the ring for the other leg lay still red hot upon the stone floor, with brilliant sparks sporting up and down its surface.

His companion, in his gigantic hands, seized the old Judge's other leg, and pressed his foot immovably to the stone floor; while his senior, in a twinkling, with a masterly application of pincers and hammer, sped the glowing bar round his ankle so tight that the skin and sinews smoked and bubbled again, and old Judge Harbottle uttered a yell that seemed to chill the very stones, and make the iron chains quiver on the wall.

Chains, vaults, smiths, and smithy all vanished in a moment; but the pain continued. Mr. Justice Harbottle was suffering torture all round the ankle on which the infernal smiths had just been operating.

His friends, Thavies and Beller were startled by the Judge's roar in the midst of their elegant trifling about a marriage *à-la-mode* case which was going on. The Judge was in panic as well as pain. The street lamps and the light of his own hall door restored him.

"I'm very bad," growled he between his set teeth; "my foot's blazing. Who was he that hurt my foot? 'Tis the gout—'tis the gout!" he said, awaking completely. "How many hours have we been coming from the playhouse? 'Sblood, what has happened on the way? I've slept half the night!"

There had been no hitch or delay, and they had driven home at a good pace.

The Judge, however, was in gout; he was feverish too; and the attack, though very short, was sharp; and when, in about a fortnight, it subsided, his ferocious joviality did not return. He could not get this dream, as he chose to call it, out of his head.

CHAPTER VIII

SOMEBODY HAS GOT INTO THE HOUSE

People remarked that the Judge was in the vapours. His doctor said he should go for a fortnight to Buxton.

Whenever the Judge fell into a brown study, he was always conning over the terms of the sentence pronounced upon him in his vision—"in one calendar month from the date of this day"; and then the usual form, "and you shall be hanged by the neck till you are dead," etc. "That will be the 10th—I'm not much in

the way of being hanged. I know what stuff dreams are, and I laugh at them; but this is continually in my thoughts, as if it forecast misfortune of some sort. I wish the day my dream gave me were passed and over. I wish I were well purged of my gout. I wish I were as I used to be. 'Tis nothing but vapours, nothing but a maggot." The copy of the parchment and letter which had announced his trial with many a snort and sneer he would read over and over again, and the scenery and people of his dream would rise about him in places the most unlikely, and steal him in a moment from all that surrounded him into a world of shadows.

The Judge had lost his iron energy and banter. He was growing taciturn and morose. The Bar remarked the change, as well they might. His friends thought him ill. The doctor said he was troubled with hypochondria, and that his gout was still lurking in his system, and ordered him to that ancient haunt of crutches and chalk-stones, Buxton.

The Judge's spirits were very low; he was frightened about himself; and he described to his housekeeper, having sent for her to his study to drink a dish of tea, his strange dream in his drive home from Drury Lane Playhouse. He was sinking into the state of nervous dejection in which men lose their faith in orthodox advice, and in despair consult quacks, astrologers, and nursery story-tellers. Could such a dream mean that he was to have a fit, and so die on the 10th? She did not think so. On the contrary, it was certain some good luck must happen on that day.

The Judge kindled; and for the first time for many days, he looked for a minute or two like himself, and he tapped her on the cheek with the hand that was not in flannel.

"Odsbud! odsheart! you dear rogue! I had forgot. There is young Tom—yellow Tom, my nephew, you know, lies sick at Harrogate; why shouldn't he go that day as well as another, and if he does, I get an estate by it? Why, lookee, I asked Doctor Hedstone yesterday if I was like to take a fit any time, and he laughed, and swore I was the last man in town to go off that way."

The Judge sent most of his servants down to Buxton to make his lodgings and all things comfortable for him. He was to follow in a day or two.

It was now the 9th; and the next day well over, he might laugh at his visions and auguries.

On the evening of the 9th, Dr. Hedstone's footman knocked at the Judge's door. The Doctor ran up the dusky stairs to the drawing-room. It was a March evening, near the hour of sunset, with an east wind whistling sharply through the chimney-stacks. A wood fire blazed cheerily on the hearth. And Judge Harbottle, in what was then called a brigadier-wig, with his red roquelaure on, helped the glowing effect of the darkened chamber, which looked red all over like a room on fire.

The Judge had his feet on a stool, and his huge grim purple face confronted the fire, and seemed to pant and swell, as the blaze alternately spread upward and collapsed. He had fallen again among his blue devils, and was thinking of retiring from the Bench, and of fifty other gloomy things.

But the Doctor, who was an energetic son of Æsculapius, would listen to no croaking, told the Judge he was full of gout, and in his present condition no judge even of his own case, but promised him leave to pronounce on all those melancholy questions, a fortnight later.

In the meantime the Judge must be very careful. He was overcharged with gout, and he must not provoke an attack, till the waters of Buxton should do that office for him, in their own salutary way.

The Doctor did not think him perhaps quite so well as he pretended, for he told him he wanted rest, and would be better if he went forthwith to his bed.

Mr. Gerningham, his valet, assisted him, and gave him his drops; and the Judge told him to wait in his bedroom till he should go to sleep.

Three persons that night had specially odd stories to tell.

The housekeeper had got rid of the trouble of amusing her little girl at this anxious time, by giving her leave to run about the sitting-rooms and look at the pictures and china, on the usual condition of touching nothing. It was not until the last gleam of sunset had for some time faded, and the twilight had so deepened that she could no longer discern the colours on the china figures on the chimneypiece or in the cabinets, that the child returned to the house-keeper's room to find her mother.

To her she related, after some prattle about the china, and the pictures, and the Judge's two grand wigs in the dressing-room off the library, an adventure of an extraordinary kind.

In the hall was placed, as was customary in those times, the sedan-chair which the master of the house occasionally used,

covered with stamped leather, and studded with gilt nails, and with its red silk blinds down. In this case, the doors of this old-fashioned conveyance were locked, the windows up, and, as I said, the blinds down, but not so closely that the curious child could not peep underneath one of them, and see into the interior.

A parting beam from the setting sun, admitted through the window of a back room, shot obliquely through the open door, and lighting on the chair, shone with a dull transparency through the crimson blind.

To her surprise, the child saw in the shadow a thin man, dressed in black, seated in it; he had sharp dark features; his nose, she fancied, a little awry, and his brown eyes were looking straight before him; his hand was on his thigh, and he stirred no more than the waxen figure she had seen at Southwark fair.

A child is so often lectured for asking questions, and on the propriety of silence, and the superior wisdom of its elders, that it accepts most things at last in good faith; and the little girl acquiesced respectfully in the occupation of the chair by this mahogany-faced person as being all right and proper.

It was not until she asked her mother who this man was, and observed her scared face as she questioned her more minutely upon the appearance of the stranger, that she began to understand that she had seen something unaccountable.

Mrs. Carwell took the key of the chair from its nail over the footman's shelf, and led the child by the hand up to the hall, having a lighted candle in her other hand. She stopped at a distance from the chair, and placed the candlestick in the child's hand.

"Peep in, Margery, again, and try if there's anything there," she whispered; "hold the candle near the blind so as to throw its light through the curtain."

The child peeped, this time with a very solemn face, and intimated at once that he was gone.

"Look again, and be sure," urged her mother.

The little girl was quite certain; and Mrs. Carwell, with her mob-cap of lace and cherry-coloured ribbons, and her dark brown hair, not yet powdered, over a very pale face, unlocked the door, looked in, and beheld emptiness.

"All a mistake, child, you see."

"*There!* ma'am! see there! He's gone round the corner," said the child.

"Where?" said Mrs. Carwell, stepping backward a step.

"Into that room."

"Tut, child! 'twas a shadow," cried Mrs. Carwell, angrily, because she was frightened. "I moved the candle." But she clutched one of the poles of the chair, which leant against the wall in the corner, and pounded the floor furiously with one end of it, being afraid to pass the open door the child had pointed to.

The cook and two kitchen-maids came running upstairs, not knowing what to make of this unwonted alarm.

They all searched the room; but it was still and empty, and no sign of any one's having been there.

Some people may suppose that the direction given to her thoughts by this odd little incident will account for a very strange illusion which Mrs. Carwell herself experienced about two hours later.

CHAPTER IX

THE JUDGE LEAVES HIS HOUSE

Mrs. Flora Carwell was going up the great staircase with a posset for the Judge in a china bowl, on a little silver tray.

Across the top of the well-staircase there runs a massive oak rail; and, raising her eyes accidentally, she saw an extremely odd-looking stranger, slim and long, leaning carelessly over with a pipe between his finger and thumb. Nose, lips, and chin seemed all to droop downward into extraordinary length, as he leant his odd peering face over the banister. In his other hand he held a coil of rope, one end of which escaped from under his elbow and hung over the rail.

Mrs. Carwell, who had no suspicion at the moment, that he was not a real person, and fancied that he was some one employed in cording the Judge's luggage, called to know what he was doing there.

Instead of answering, he turned about, and walked across the lobby, at about the same leisurely pace at which she was ascending, and entered a room, into which she followed him. It was an uncarpeted and unfurnished chamber. An open trunk lay upon the floor empty, and beside it the coil of rope; but except herself there was no one in the room.

Mrs. Carwell was very much frightened, and now concluded that the child must have seen the same ghost that had just appeared to her. Perhaps, when she was able to think it over, it was a relief to believe so; for the face, figure, and dress described by

the child were awfully like Pyneweck; and this certainly was not he.

Very much scared and very hysterical, Mrs. Carwell ran down to her room, afraid to look over her shoulder, and got some companions about her, and wept, and talked, and drank more than one cordial, and talked and wept again, and so on, until, in those early days, it was ten o'clock, and time to go to bed.

A scullery-maid remained up finishing some of her scouring and "scalding" for some time after the other servants—who, as I said, were few in number—that night had got to their beds. This was a low-browed, broad-faced, intrepid wench with black hair, who did not "vally a ghost nor a button," and treated the housekeeper's hysterics with measureless scorn.

The old house was quiet now. It was near twelve o'clock, no sounds were audible except the muffled wailing of the wintry winds, piping high among the roofs and chimneys, or rumbling at intervals, in under gusts, through the narrow channels of the street.

The spacious solitudes of the kitchen level were awfully dark, and this sceptical kitchen-wench was the only person now up and about in the house. She hummed tunes to herself for a time; and then stopped and listened; and then resumed her work again. At last, she was destined to be more terrified than even was the housekeeper.

There was a back kitchen in this house, and from this she heard, as if coming from below its foundations, a sound like heavy strokes, that seemed to shake the earth beneath her feet. Sometimes a dozen in sequence, at regular intervals; sometimes fewer. She walked out softly into the passage, and was surprised to see a dusky glow issuing from this room, as if from a charcoal fire.

The room seemed thick with smoke.

Looking in she very dimly beheld a monstrous figure, over a furnace, beating with a mighty hammer the rings and rivets of a chain.

The strokes, swift and heavy as they looked, sounded hollow and distant. The man stopped, and pointed to something on the floor, that, through the smoky haze, looked, she thought, like a dead body. She remarked no more; but the servants in the room close by, startled from their sleep by a hideous scream, found her in a swoon on the flags, close to the door, where she had just witnessed this ghastly vision.

Startled by the girl's incoherent asseverations that she had seen

the Judge's corpse on the floor, two servants having first searched the lower part of the house, went rather frightened upstairs to inquire whether their master was well. They found him, not in his bed, but in his room. He had a table with candles burning at his bedside, and was getting on his clothes again; and he swore and cursed at them roundly in his old style, telling them that he had business, and that he would discharge on the spot any scoundrel who should dare to disturb him again.

So the invalid was left to his quietude.

In the morning it was rumoured here and there in the street that the Judge was dead. A servant was sent from the house three doors away, by Counsellor Traverse, to inquire at Judge Harbottle's hall door.

The servant who opened it was pale and reserved, and would only say that the Judge was ill. He had had a dangerous accident; Doctor Hedstone had been with him at seven o'clock in the morning.

There were averted looks, short answers, pale and frowning faces, and all the usual signs that there was a secret that sat heavily upon their minds, and the time for disclosing which had not yet come. That time would arrive when the coroner had arrived, and the mortal scandal that had befallen the house could be no longer hidden. For that morning Mr. Justice Harbottle had been found hanging by the neck from the banister at the top of the great staircase, and quite dead.

There was not the smallest sign of any struggle or resistance. There had not been heard a cry or any other noise in the slightest degree indicative of violence. There was medical evidence to show that, in his atrabilious state, it was quite on the cards that he might have made away with himself. The jury found accordingly that it was a case of suicide. But to those who were acquainted with the strange story which Judge Harbottle had related to at least two persons, the fact that the catastrophe occurred on the morning of March 10th seemed a startling coincidence.

A few days after, the pomp of a great funeral attended him to the grave; and so, in the language of Scripture, "the rich man died, and was buried."

Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Lord Lytton

THE HAUNTED AND THE HAUNTERS

A friend of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest—"Fancy! since we last met, I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London."

"Really haunted?—and by what?—ghosts?"

"Well, I can't answer these questions—all I know is this—six weeks ago I and my wife were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, 'Apartments Furnished.' The situation suited us: we entered the house—liked the rooms—engaged them by the week—and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer, and I don't wonder at it."

"What did you see?"

"Excuse me—I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer—nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an undefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife—silly woman though she be—and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning, I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said, dryly: 'I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger; few ever stayed a second night; none before you, a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.'

"'They—who?' I asked, affecting a smile.

"'Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don't mind them; I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care—I'm old, and must die soon, anyhow;

and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness, that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her farther. I paid for my week, and too happy were I and my wife to get off so cheaply."

"You excite my curiosity," said I; "nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight towards the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up—no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighbouring areas, said to me, "Do you want any one in that house, sir?"

"Yes, I heard it was to let."

"Let!—why, the woman who kept it is dead—has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J—— offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

"Would not!—and why?"

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her."

"Pooh!—you speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No.—."

"What is he?—in any business?"

"No, sir—nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J——, in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home—an elderly man, with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted—that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation—that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J——, with

great courtesy, "the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question—the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character.

"The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse, for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighbourhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of it, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent-free for a year to any one who would pay its rates and taxes."

"How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is that my life has been spent in the East Indies and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, amongst whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repainting and roofing it—added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles—advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel retired on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day, and although they deponed that they had all seen something different, that something was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, or even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement.

"Then I put in the old woman I have spoken off, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories—

to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I, "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them—even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me,—and thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home I summoned my confidential servant,—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard—something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think, if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"Oh, sir! pray trust me," answered F——, grinning with delight.

"Very well—then here are the keys of the house—this is the address. Go now—select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire—air the bed well—see, of course, that there are candles as

well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger—so much for my weapons—arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honour. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. The volume I selected was one of Macaulay's Essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely towards the haunted house. I took with me a favourite dog—an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier—a dog fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats—a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night, but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still, there was a moon—faint and sickly, but still a moon—and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

"All right, sir, and very comfortable."

"Oh!" said I, rather disappointed; "have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?"

"Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer."

"What?—what?"

"The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear—nothing more."

"You are not at all frightened?"

"I! not a bit of it, sir"; and the man's bold look reassured me on one point—viz. that, happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation and followed me and F—— through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first

visited the subterranean apartments, the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not wine-bibbers.

For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little backyard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp—and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint—the foot of a child: the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning.

We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground floor, a dining parlour, a small back-parlour, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman—as still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an armchair. F—— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so, a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

"Why, this is better than the turning-tables," said I, with a half-laugh—and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F——, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale blue misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet. "Put back that chair opposite to me," said I to F——; "put it back to the wall."

F—— obeyed. "Was that you, sir?" said he, turning abruptly. "I—what?"

"Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder —just here."

"No," said I. "But we have jugglers present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*."

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms—in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms—a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor—a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself.

This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place—no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard, without locks, flushed with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards—only hooks to suspend female dresses—nothing else; we sounded the walls—evidently solid—the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F——, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for it is a——"

Before he had finished his sentence the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both—some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small blank dreary room without furniture—a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner—a small window—the shutters closed—not even a fireplace—no other door but that by which we had entered—no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have

hidden. As we stood gazing around, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened: we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of undefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my boot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I open the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters—the window looked on the little backyard I have before described; there was no ledge without—nothing but sheer descent. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F——, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me, and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gaiety amidst circumstances so extraordinary compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain.

As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing-place. We both saw a large pale light—as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial—move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid; rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it—a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers

that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping-room.

I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers; there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing—nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor—just before us. We went through the other attics (in all, four) the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen—nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand; just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bed-chamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them, my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring, took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed-head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short—they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love—some secret that seemed of crime. "We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember, "for how every one else would execrate us if all was known." Again: "Don't let anyone be in the same room with you at night—you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had

written these words: "Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as——"

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents. Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvellous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself—laid the letters on the table—stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering—and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed-head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay.

Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearth-rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open; but no—it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table—softly, softly—no visible hand—it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other; I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round the floor—no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed-head; my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backwards and forwards. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentrated all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognised him had we met in the streets, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run—run! it is after me!" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing in-

voluntarily, calling him to stop; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street-door open —heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the Thing, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally trying to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognise me. Whoever had seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as if in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

Perhaps in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness, which the reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the Marvellous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world—phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the Supernatural is the Impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature

of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible," but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature—i.e., not supernatural."

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present; and he is the material agency by which from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept again, as truthful, the tales of Spirit Manifestation in America—musical or other sounds—writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand—articles of furniture moved about without apparent human agency—or the actual sight and touch of hands, to which no bodies seem to belong—still there must be found the *medium* or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves, by whom, or through whom, the effects presented to human beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism or electro-biology; the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerised patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmeriser a hundred miles distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being; it may be through a material fluid—call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will—which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other.

Hence all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believed to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of nature, might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented, to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motives so to do, I felt an interest in my theory

which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare though perhaps perilous chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light—the page was over-shadowed; I looked up, and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself out of the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I seemed to distinguish them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half-believed, half-doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, "Is this fear? it is *not* fear!" I strove to rise—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition; that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond men's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of men.

And now, as this impression grew on me, now came, at last, horror—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said, "This

is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear, I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand towards the weapon on the table; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn; it was the same with the fire—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness.

The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these—"I do not fear, my soul does not fear"; and at the same time I found the strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows—tore aside the curtain—flung open the shutters; my first thought was—LIGHT. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially—but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone—except that I could yet see a dim shadow which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover—an old mahogany round table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person—lean, wrinkled, small too—a woman's hand.

That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table: hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many-coloured—green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny will-o'-the-wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own

caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape—a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life—ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned towards me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow—eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape equally distinct, equally ghastly—a man's shape—a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress; for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable—simulacra—phantasms; and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like aspect and ghost-like stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a bloodstain on the breast of the female; and the phantom-male was leaning on its phantom-sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up—they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet-door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of a woman, aged. In her hand she held letters—the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, then she opened the letters and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned—bloated, bleached—seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable, squalid child, with

famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow—malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them; larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other—forms like nought ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings.

Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentrated all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow—above all, from those strange serpent eyes—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in nought else around me, I was aware that there was a *will,* and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servants' room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him—no movement; I approached—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favourite—acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken—actually twisted out of the vertebræ. Had this been done in the dark?—must it not have been by a hand human as mine?—must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since—that is, it will go in a strange erratic way for a few hours, and then comes to a dead stop—it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Not till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression—for which I could not account—that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena—if I may use the term—which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floor, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself; nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool, to this effect:—

"Honoured Sir,—I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think I deserve it, unless—which Heaven

forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails to-morrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing but start and tremble, and fancy It is behind me. I humbly beg you, honoured sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother's, at Walworth —John knows her address."

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hackcab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared, and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered, "I know but little of the woman's earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and

sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? For what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake—tell you what money you had in your pocket—nay, describe your very thoughts—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rapport*."

"Granting mesmerism, so far carried, to be a fact, you are right. And you would infer from this that a mesmeriser might produce the extraordinary effects you and others have witnessed over inanimate objects—fill the air with sights and sounds?"

"Or impress our senses with the belief in them—we never having been *en rapport* with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against nature, only a rare power in nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the *soul,* and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent to our senses—is a very ancient though obsolete theory, upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural.

"Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus describes as not difficult, and which the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never dis-

cover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burnt dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has so much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form.

"Hence, like the best-attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul—that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. They come for little or no object—they seldom speak, if they do come; they utter no ideas above that of an ordinary person on earth. These American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead—Shakespeare, Bacon—heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare and Plato said and wrote when on earth.

"Nor, what is more notable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny—viz., nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiend-like shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodiless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those may produce chemic wonders—in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these produce electric wonders. But they differ in this from Normal Science—they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe un-

consciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason: no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end.

"These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is, that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe: some material force must have killed my dog; it might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog! that is fearful! indeed, it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied, forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed—nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small back-yard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that——"

"You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

About ten days afterwards I received a letter from Mr. J——, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious enquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters), she had married, against the wish of her relatives, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any verdict other than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child—and in the event of the child's death, the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterwards—it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbours deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death, said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape—crept out into the back-yard—tried to scale the wall—fallen back exhausted, and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune.

Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruis-

ing vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterwards. The widow was left in affluence; but reverses of various kinds had befallen her: a bank broke—an investment failed—she went into a small business and became insolvent—then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work—never long retaining a place, though nothing peculiar against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house —we went into the blind dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trap-door, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some mouldering furniture—three chairs, an oak settee, a table—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest-of-drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank—costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court dresses—a handsome court sword—in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged

on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colourless volatile essences, of what nature I shall say no more than that they were not poisons—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber—also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colours most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight.

It was a most peculiar face—a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey: the width and flatness of frontal—the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw—the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald—and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power. The strange thing was this—the instant I saw the miniature I recognised a startling likeness to one of the rarest portraits in the world—the portrait of a man of a rank only below that of royalty, who in his own day had made a considerable noise. History says little or nothing of him; but search the correspondence of his contemporaries, and you find reference to his wild daring, his bold profligacy, his restless spirit, his taste for the occult sciences. While still in the meridian of life he died and was buried, so say the chronicles, in a foreign land. He died in time to escape the grasp of the law, for he was accused of crimes which would have given him to the headsman.

After his death, the portraits of him, which had been numerous, for he had been a munificent encourager of art, were brought up and destroyed—it was supposed by his heirs, who might have been glad could they have razed his very name from their splendid line. He had enjoyed a vast wealth; a large portion of this was believed to have been embezzled by a favourite astrologer or soothsayer—at all events, it had unaccountably vanished at the time of his death. One portrait alone of him was supposed to have escaped the general destruction; I had seen it in the house of a collector some months before. It had made on me a

wonderful impression, as it does on all who behold it—a face never to be forgotten; and there was that face in the miniature that lay within my hand. True, that in the miniature the man was a few years older than in the portrait I had seen, or than the original was even at the time of his death. But a few years!—why, between the date in which flourished that direful noble, and the date in which the miniature was evidently painted, there was an interval of more than two centuries. While I was thus gazing, silent and wondering, Mr. J—— said:

"But is it possible? I have known this man."

"How—where?" I cried.

"In India. He was high in the confidence of the Rajah of ——, and wellnigh drew him into a revolt which would have lost the Rajah his dominions. The man was a Frenchman—his name de V——, clever, bold, lawless. We insisted on his dismissal and banishment: it must be the same man—no two faces like his—yet this miniature seems nearly a hundred years old."

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Withinside the lid was engraved "Mariana to thee—Be faithful in life and in death to——." Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan, who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house—that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J——, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round, but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A very peculiar, but not strong nor displeasing odour

came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterwards discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odour, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room—a creeping tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilt—the saucer was broken—the compass rolled to the end of the room—and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trap-door; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet: it was bound in a plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus:— "On all that it can reach within these walls—sentient or inanimate, living or dead—as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burnt the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints. But my story is not yet done. A few days after Mr. J—— had removed into the house, I paid him a visit. We were standing by the open window and conversing. A van containing some articles of furniture which he was moving from his former house was at the door. I had just urged on him my theory that all those phenomena regarded as supermundane had emanated from a human brain; adducing the charm, or rather curse, we had found and destroyed in support of my philosophy. Mr. J—— was observing in reply, "That even if mesmerism, or whatever analogous power it might be called, could really thus work in the absence of the operator, and produce effects so extraordinary, still could those effects continue when the oper-

ator himself was dead? and if the spell had been wrought, and, indeed, the room walled up, more than seventy years ago, the probability was, that the operator had long since departed this life"; Mr. J——, I say, was thus answering, when I caught hold of his arm and pointed to the street below.

A well-dressed man had crossed from the opposite side, and was accosting the carrier in charge of the van. His face, as he stood, was exactly fronting our window. It was the face of the miniature we had discovered; it was the face of the portrait of the noble three centuries ago.

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. J——, "that is the face of de V——, and scarcely a day older than when I saw it in the Rajah's court in my youth!"

Seized by the same thought, we both hastened downstairs. I was first in the street; but the man had already gone. I caught sight of him, however, not many yards in advance, and in another moment I was by his side.

I had resolved to speak to him, but when I looked into his face I felt as if it were impossible to do so. That eye—the eye of the serpent—fixed and held me spellbound. And withal, about the man's whole person there was a dignity, an air of pride and station and superiority, that would have made any one, habituated to the usages of the world, hesitate long before venturing upon a liberty or impertinence. And what could I say? what was it I would ask? Thus ashamed of my first impulse, I fell a few paces back, still, however, following the stranger, undecided what else to do. Meanwhile he turned the corner of the street; a plain carriage was in waiting, with a servant out of livery, dressed like a *valet-de-place,* at the carriage door. In another moment he had stepped into the carriage, and it drove off. I returned to the house. Mr. J—— was still at the street door. He had asked the carrier what the stranger had said to him.

"Merely asked whom that house now belonged to."

The same evening I happened to go with a friend to a place in town called the Cosmopolitan Club, a place open to men of all countries, all opinions, all degrees. One orders one's coffee, smokes one's cigars. One is always sure to meet agreeable, sometimes remarkable persons.

I had not been two minutes in the room before I beheld at a table, conversing with an acquaintance of mine, whom I will designate by the initial G——, the man—the Original of the Miniature. He was now without hit hat, and the likeness was

yet more startling, only I observed that while he was conversing there was less severity in the countenance; there was even a smile, though a very quiet and very cold one. The dignity of mien I had acknowledged in the street was also more striking; a dignity akin to that which invests some prince of the East—conveying the idea of supreme indifference and habitual, indisputable, indolent, but resistless power.

G—— soon after left the stranger, who then took up a scientific journal, which seemed to absorb his attention.

I drew G—— aside. "Who and what is that gentleman?"

"That? Oh, a very remarkable man indeed. I met him last year amidst the caves of Petra—the scriptural Edom. He is the best Oriental scholar I know. We joined company, had an adventure with robbers, in which he showed a coolness that saved our lives; afterwards he invited me to spend a day with him in a house he had bought at Damascus—a house buried amongst almond blossoms and roses—the most beautiful thing! He had lived there for some years, quite as an Oriental, in grand style. I half suspect he is a renegade, immensely rich, very odd; by the by, a great mesmeriser. I have seen him with my own eyes produce an effect on inanimate things. If you take a letter from your pocket and throw it to the other end of the room, he will order it to come to his feet, and you will see the letter wriggle itself along the floor till it has obeyed his command. 'Pon my honour, 'tis true: I have seen him affect even the weather, disperse or collect clouds, by means of a glass tube or wand. But he does not like talking of these matters to strangers. He has only just arrived in England; says he has not been for a great many years; let me introduce him to you."

"Certainly! He is English, then? What is his name?"

"Oh!—a very homely one—Richards."

"And what is his birth—his family?"

"How do I know? What does it signify!—no doubt some parvenu, but rich—so infernally rich!"

G—— drew me up to the stranger, and the introduction was effected. The manners of Mr. Richards were not those of an adventurous traveller. Travellers are in general constitutionally gifted with high animal spirits: they are talkative, eager, imperious. Mr. Richards was calm and subdued in tone, with manners which were made distant by the loftiness of punctilious courtesy—the manners of a former age. I observed that the English he spoke was not exactly of our day. I should even have

said that the accent was slightly foreign. But then Mr. Richards remarked that he had been little in the habit for many years of speaking in his native tongue. The conversation fell upon the changes in the aspect of London since he had last visited our metropolis. G—— then glanced off to the moral changes—literary, social, political—the great men who were removed from the stage within the last twenty years—the new great men who were coming on. In all this Mr. Richards evinced no interest. He had evidently read none of our living authors, and seemed scarcely acquainted by name with our younger statesmen. Once and only once he laughed; it was when G—— asked him whether he had any thought of getting into Parliament. And the laugh was inward—sarcastic—sinister—a sneer raised into a laugh. After a few minutes G—— left us to talk to some other acquaintances who had just lounged into the room, and I then said quietly:

"I have seen a miniature of you, Mr. Richards, in the house you once inhabited, and perhaps built, if not wholly, at least in part, in —— Street. You passed by that house this morning."

Not till I had finished did I raise my eyes to his, and then his fixed my gaze so steadfastly that I could not withdraw it—those fascinating serpent eyes. But involuntarily, and as if the words that translated my thought were dragged from me, I added in a low whisper, "I have been a student in the mysteries of life and nature; of those mysteries I have known the occult professors. I have the right to speak to you thus." And I uttered a certain pass-word.

"Well," said he, dryly, "I concede the right—what would you ask?"

"To what extent human will in certain temperaments can extend?"

"To what extent can thought extend? Think, and before you draw breath you are in China."

"True. But my thought has no power in China."

"Give it expression, and it may have: you may write down a thought which, sooner or later, may alter the whole condition of China. What is a law but a thought? Therefore thought is infinite—therefore thought has power; not in proportion to its value—a bad thought may make a bad law as potent as a good thought can make a good one."

"Yes; what you say confirms my own theory. Through invisible currents one human brain may transmit its ideas to other human brains with the same rapidity as a thought promulgated by visible

means. And as thought is imperishable—as it leaves its stamp behind it in the natural world even when the thinker has passed out of this world—so the thought of the living may have power to rouse up and revive the thoughts of the dead—such as those thoughts *were in life*—though the thought of the living cannot reach the thoughts which the dead *now* may entertain. Is it not so?"

"I decline to answer, if, in my judgment, thought has the limit you would fix to it; but proceed. You have a special question you wish to put."

"Intense malignity in an intense will, engendered in a peculiar temperament, and aided by natural means within the reach of science, may produce effects like those ascribed of old to evil magic. It might thus haunt the walls of a human habitation with spectral revivals of all guilty thoughts and guilty deeds once conceived and done within those walls; all, in short, with which the evil will claims *rapport* and affinity—imperfect, incoherent, fragmentary snatches at the old dramas acted therein years ago. Thoughts thus crossing each other haphazard, as in the nightmare of a vision, growing up into phantom sights and sounds, and all serving to create horror, not because those sights and sounds are really visitations from a world without, but that they are ghastly monstrous renewals of what have been in this world itself, set into malignant play by a malignant mortal.

"And it is through the material agency of that human brain that these things would acquire even a human power—would strike as with the shock of electricity, and might kill, if the thought of the person assailed did not rise superior to the dignity of the original assailer—might kill the most powerful animal if unnerved by fear, but not injure the feeblest man, if, while his flesh crept, his mind stood out fearless. Thus, when in old stories we read of a magician rent to pieces by the fiends he had evoked—or still more, in Eastern legends, that one magician succeeds by arts in destroying another—there may be so far truth, that a material being has clothed, from its own evil propensities, certain elements and fluids, usually quiescent or harmless, with awful shape and terrific force—just as the lightning that had lain hidden and innocent in the cloud becomes by natural law suddenly visible, takes a distinct shape to the eye, and can strike destruction on the object to which it is attracted."

"You are not without glimpses of a very mighty secret," said Mr. Richards, composedly. "According to your view, could a

mortal obtain the power you speak of, he would necessarily be a malignant and evil being."

"If the power were exercised as I have said, most malignant and most evil—though I believe in the ancient traditions that he could not injure the good. His will could only injure those with whom it has established an affinity, or over whom it forces unresisted sway. I will now imagine an example that may be within the laws of nature, yet seem wild as the fables of a bewildered monk.

"You will remember that Albertus Magnus, after describing minutely the process by which spirits may be invoked and commanded, adds emphatically that the process will instruct and avail only to the few—that a *man must be born a magician*!—that is, born with a peculiar physical temperament, as a man is born a poet. Rarely are men in whose constitution lurks this occult power of the highest order of intellect;—usually in the intellect there is some twist, perversity, or disease. But, on the other hand, they must possess, to an astonishing degree, the faculty to concentrate thought on a single object—the energic faculty that we call *will*. Therefore, though their intellect be not sound, it is exceedingly forcible for the attainment of what it desires. I will imagine such a person, pre-eminently gifted with this constitution and its concomitant forces. I will place him in the loftier grades of society. I will suppose his desires emphatically those of the sensualist—he has, therefore, a strong love of life. He is an absolute egotist—his will is concentrated in himself—he has fierce passions—he knows no enduring, no holy affections, but he can covet eagerly what for the moment he desires—he can hate implacably what opposes itself to his objects—he can commit fearful crimes, yet feel small remorse—he resorts rather to curses upon others, than to penitence for his misdeeds. Circumstances, to which his constitution guides him, lead him to a rare knowledge of the natural secrets which may serve his egotism. He is a close observer where his passions encourage observation, he is a minute calculator, not from love of truth, but where love of self sharpens his faculties—therefore he can be a man of science.

"I suppose such a being, having by experience learned the power of his arts over others, trying what may be the power of will over his own frame, and studying all that in natural philosophy may increase that power. He loves life, he dreads death; he *wills to live on*. He cannot restore himself to youth, he cannot entirely stay the progress of death, he cannot make

himself immortal in the flesh and blood; but he may arrest for a time so prolonged as to appear incredible, if I said it—that hardening of the parts which constitutes old age. A year may age him no more than an hour ages another. His intense will, scientifically trained into system, operates, in short, over the wear and tear of his own frame. He lives on. That he may not seem a portent and a miracle, he *dies* from time to time, seemingly, to certain persons. Having schemed the transfer of a wealth that suffices to his wants, he disappears from one corner of the world, and contrives that his obsequies shall be celebrated. He reappears at another corner of the world, where he resides undetected, and does not revisit the scenes of his former career till all who could remember his features are no more. He would be profoundly miserable if he had affections—he has none but for himself. No good man would accept his longevity, and to no men, good or bad, would he or could he communicate its true secret. Such a man might exist; such a man as I have described I see now before me!—Duke of ——, in the court of ——, dividing time between lust and brawl, alchemists and wizards;—again, in the last century, charlatan and criminal, with name less noble, domiciled in the house at which you gazed to-day, and flying from the law you had outraged, none knew whither; traveller once more revisiting London, with the same earthly passion which filled your heart when races now no more walked through yonder streets; outlaw from the school of all the nobler and diviner mystics; execrable Image of Life in Death and Death in Life, I warn you back from the cities and homes of healthful men; back to the ruins of departed empires; back to the deserts of nature unredeemed!"

There answered me a whisper so musical, so potently musical, that it seemed to enter into my whole being, and subdue me despite myself. Thus it said:

"I have sought one like you for the last hundred years. Now I have found you, we part not till I know what I desire. The vision that sees through the Past, and cleaves through the veil of the Future, is in you at this hour; never before, never to come again. The vision of no puling fantastic girl, of no sick-bed somnambule, but of a strong man, with a vigorous brain. Soar and look forth!"

As he spoke I felt as if I rose out of myself upon eagle wings. All the weight seemed gone from air—roofless the room, roofless

the dome of space. I was not in the body—where I knew not—but aloft over time, over earth.

Again I heard the melodious whisper,—"You say right. I have mastered great secrets by the power of Will; true, by Will and by Science I can retard the process of years: but death comes not by age alone. Can I frustrate the accidents which bring death upon the young?"

"No; every accident is a providence. Before a providence snaps every human will."

"Shall I die at last, ages and ages hence, by the slow, though inevitable, growth of time, or by the cause that I call accident?"

"By a cause you call accident."

"Is not the end still remote?" asked the whisper with a slight tremor.

"Regarded as my life regards time, it is still remote."

"And shall I, before then, mix with the world of men as I did ere I learned these secrets, resume eager interest in their strife and their trouble—battle with ambition, and use the power of the sage to win the power that belongs to kings?"

"You will yet play a part on the earth that will fill earth with commotion and amaze. For wondrous designs have you, a wonder yourself, been permitted to live on through the centuries. All the secrets you have stored will then have their uses—all that now makes you a stranger amidst the generations will contribute then to make you their lord. As the trees and the straws are drawn into a whirlpool—as they spin round, are sucked to the deep, and again tossed aloft by the eddies, so shall races and thrones be plucked into the charm of your vortex. Awful Destroyer—but in destroying, made, against your own will, a Constructor!"

"And that date, too, is far off?"

"Far off; when it comes, think your end in this world is at hand!"

"How and what is the end? Look east, west, south, and north."

"In the north, where you never yet trod, towards the point whence your instincts have warned you, there a spectre will seize you. 'Tis Death! I see a ship—it is haunted—'tis chased—it sails on. Baffled navies sail after that ship. It enters the regions of ice. It passes a sky red with meteors. Two moons stand on high, over ice-reefs. I see the ship locked between white defiles—they are ice-rocks. I see the dead strew the decks—stark and livid, green mould on their limbs. All are dead, but one man—it is you! But years,

though so slowly they come, have then scathed you. There is the coming of age on your brow, and the will is relaxed in the cells of the brain. Still that will, though enfeebled, exceeds all that man knew before you, through the will you live on, gnawed with famine; and nature no longer obeys you in that death-spreading region; the sky is a sky of iron, and the air has iron clamps, and the ice-rocks wedge in the ship. Hark how it cracks and groans. Ice will imbed it as amber imbeds a straw. And a man has gone forth, living yet, from the ship and its dead; and he has clambered up the spikes of an iceberg, and the two moons gaze down on his form. That man is yourself; and terror is on you—terror; and terror has swallowed your will. And I see swarming up the steep ice-rock, grey grisly things. The bears of the north have scented their quarry—they come near you and nearer, shambling and rolling their bulk. And in that day every moment shall seem to you longer than the centuries through which you have passed. And heed this—after life, moments continued make the bliss or the hell of eternity."

"Hush," said the whisper; "but the day, you assure me, is far off—very far! I go back to the almond and rose of Damascus!—sleep!"

The room swam before my eyes. I became insensible. When I recovered, I found G—— holding my hand and smiling. He said, "You who have always declared yourself proof against mesmerism have succumbed at last to my friend Richards."

"Where is Mr. Richards?"

"Gone, when you passed into a trance—saying quietly to me. 'Your friend will not wake for an hour.'"

I asked, as collectedly as I could, where Mr. Richards lodged.

"At the Trafalgar Hotel."

"Give me your arm," said I to G——; "let us call on him; I have something to say."

When we arrived at the hotel, we were told that Mr. Richards had returned twenty minutes before, paid his bill, left directions with his servant (a Greek) to pack his effects and proceed to Malta by the steamer that should leave Southampton the next day. Mr. Richards had merely said of his own movements that he had visits to pay in the neighbourhood of London, and it was uncertain whether he should be able to reach Southampton in time for that steamer; if not, he should follow in the next one.

The waiter asked me my name. On my informing him, he gave me a note that Mr. Richards had left for me, in case I called.

The note was as follows: "I wished you to utter what was in your mind. You obeyed. I have therefore established power over you. For three months from this day you can communicate to no living man what has passed between us—you cannot even show this note to the friend by your side. During three months, silence complete as to me and mine. Do you doubt my power to lay on you this command?—try to disobey me. At the end of the third month, the spell is raised. For the rest I spare you. I shall visit your grave a year and a day after it has received you."

So ends this strange story, which I ask no one to believe. I write it down exactly three months after I received the above note. I could not write it before, nor could I show to G——, in spite of his urgent request, the note which I read under the gas-lamp by his side.

Arthur Machen

THE GREAT RETURN

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CHAPTER I

THE RUMOUR OF THE MARVELLOUS

There are strange things lost and forgotten in obscure corners of the newspaper. I often think that the most extraordinary item of intelligence that I have read in print appeared a few years ago in the London Press. It came from a well-known and most respected news agency; I imagine it was in all the papers. It was astounding.

The circumstances necessary—not to the understanding of this paragraph, for that is out of the question—but, we will say, to the understanding of the events which made it possible, are these. We had invaded Thibet, and there had been trouble in the hierarchy of that country, and a personage known as the Tashai Lama had taken refuge with us in India. He went on pilgrimage from one Buddhist shrine to another, and came at last to a holy mountain of Buddhism, the name of which I have forgotten. And thus the morning paper:

His Holiness the Tashai Lama then ascended the Mountain and was transfigured.—Reuter.

That was all. And from that day to this I have never heard a word of explanation or comment on this amazing statement.

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There was no more, it seemed, to be said. "Reuter" apparently thought he had made his simple statement of the facts of the case, had thereby done his duty, and so it all ended. Nobody, so far as I know, ever wrote to any paper asking what Reuter meant by it, or what the Tashai Lama meant by it. I suppose the fact was that nobody cared twopence about the matter; and so this strange event—if there were any such event—was exhibited to us for a moment, and the lantern show revolved to other spectacles.

This is an extreme instance of the manner in which the marvellous is flashed out to us and then withdrawn behind its black veils and concealments; but I have known of other cases. Now and again, at intervals of a few years, there appear in the newspapers strange stories of the strange doings of what are technically called *poltergeists*. Some house, often a lonely farm, is suddenly subjected to an infernal bombardment. Great stones crash through the windows, thunder down the chimneys, impelled by no visible hand. The plates and cups and saucers are whirled from the dresser into the middle of the kitchen, no one can say how or by what agency. Upstairs the big bedstead and an old chest or two are heard bounding on the floor as if in a mad ballet. Now and then such doings as these excite a whole neighbourhood; sometimes a London paper sends a man down to make an investigation. He writes half a column of description on the Monday, a couple of paragraphs on the Tuesday, and then returns to town. Nothing has been explained, the matter vanishes away; and nobody cares. The tale trickles for a day or two through the Press, and then instantly disappears, like an Australian stream, into the bowels of darkness. It is possible, I suppose, that this singular incuriousness as to marvellous events and reports is not wholly unaccountable. It may be that the events in question are, as it were, psychic accidents and misadventures. They are not meant to happen, or, rather, to be manifested. They belong to the world on the other side of the dark curtain; and it is only by some queer mischance that a corner of that curtain is twitched aside for an instant. Then—for an instant—we see; but the personages whom

Mr. Kipling calls the Lords of Life and Death take care that we do not see too much. Our business is with things higher and things lower, with things different, anyhow; and on the whole we are not suffered to distract ourselves with that which does not really concern us. The transfiguration of the Lama and the tricks of the *poltergeist* are evidently no affairs of ours; we raise an uninterested eyebrow and pass on—to poetry or to statistics.

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Be it noted; I am not professing any fervent personal belief in the reports to which I have alluded. For all I know, the Lama, in spite of Reuter, was not transfigured, and the *poltergeist,* in spite of the late Mr. Andrew Lang, may in reality be only mischievous Polly, the servant girl at the farm. And to go farther: I do not know that I should be justified in putting either of these cases of the marvellous in line with a chance paragraph that caught my eye last summer; for this had not, on the face of it at all events, anything wildly out of the common. Indeed, I dare say that I should not have read it, should not have seen it, if it had not contained the name of a place which I had once visited, which had then moved me in an odd manner that I could not understand. Indeed, I am sure that this particular paragraph deserves to stand alone, for even if the *poltergeist* be a real *poltergeist,* it merely reveals the psychic whimsicality of some region that is not our region. There were better things and more relevant things behind the few lines dealing with Llantrisant, the little town by the sea in Arfonshire.

Not on the surface, I must say, for the cutting—I have preserved it—reads as follows:—

> LLANTRISANT.—The season promises very favourably: temperature of the sea yesterday at noon, 65 deg. Remarkable occurrences are supposed to have taken place during the recent Revival. The lights have not been observed lately. "The Crown." "The Fishermen's rest."

The style was odd certainly; knowing a little of newspapers, I could see that the figure called, I think, *tmesis,* or cutting, had been generously employed; the exuberances of the local correspondent had been pruned by a Fleet Street expert. And these poor men are often hurried; but what did those "lights" mean? What strange matters had the vehement blue pencil blotted out and brought to naught?

That was my first thought, and then, thinking still of Llantrisant and how I had first discovered it and found it strange, I read the paragraph again, and was saddened almost to see, as I thought, the obvious explanation. I had forgotten for the moment that it was war-time, that scares and rumours and terrors about traitorous signals and flashing lights were current everywhere by land and sea; someone, no doubt, had been watching innocent farmhouse windows and thoughtless fanlights of lodging-houses; these were the "lights" that had not been observed lately.

I found out afterwards that the Llantrisant correspondent had no such treasonous lights in his mind, but something very different. Still; what do we know? He may have been mistaken, "the great rose of fire" that came over the deep may have been the port light of a coasting-ship. Did it shine at last from the old chapel on the headlands? Possibly; or possibly it was the doctor's lamp at Sarnau, some miles away. I have had wonderful opportunities lately of analysing the marvels of lying, conscious and unconscious; and indeed almost incredible feats in this way can be performed. If I incline to the less likely explanation of the "lights" at Llantrisant, it is merely because this explanation seems to me to be altogether congruous with the "remarkable occurrences" of the newspaper paragraph.

After all, if rumour and gossip and hearsay are crazy things to be utterly neglected and laid aside: on the other hand, evidence is evidence, and when a couple of reputable surgeons assert, as they do assert in the case of Olwen Phillips, Croeswen, Llantrisant, that there has been a "kind of resurrection of the body," it is merely foolish to say that these things don't happen. The girl was a mass of tuberculosis, she was within a few hours of death; she is now full of life. And so, I do not believe that the rose of fire was merely a ship's light, magnified and transformed by dreaming Welsh sailors.

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But now I am going forward too fast. I have not dated the paragraph, so I cannot give the exact day of its appearance, but I think it was somewhere between the second and third week of June. I cut it out partly because it was about Llantrisant, partly because of the "remarkable occurrences." I have an appetite for these matters, though I also have this misfortune, that I require evidence before I am ready to credit them, and I have a sort of lingering hope that some day I shall be able to elaborate some scheme or theory of such things.

But in the meantime, as a temporary measure, I hold what I call the doctrine of the jig-saw puzzle. That is: this remarkable occurrence, and that, and the other may be, and usually are, of no significance. Coincidence and chance and unsearchable causes will now and again make clouds that are undeniable fiery dragons, and potatoes that resemble Eminent Statesmen exactly and minutely in every feature, and rocks that are like eagles and lions. All this is nothing; it is when you get your set of odd shapes and find that they fit into one another, and at last that they are but parts of a large design; it is then that research grows interesting and indeed amazing, it is then that one queer form confirms the other, that the whole plan displayed justifies, corroborates, explains each separate piece.

So; it was within a week or ten days after I had read the paragraph about Llantrisant and had cut it out that I got a letter from a friend who was taking an early holiday in those regions.

"You will be interested," he wrote, "to hear that they have taken to ritualistic practices at Llantrisant. I went into the church the other day, and instead of smelling like a damp vault as usual, it was positively reeking with incense."

I knew better than that. The old parson was a firm Evangelical; he would rather have burnt sulphur in his church than incense any day. So I could not make out this report at all; and went down to Arfon a few weeks later determined to investigate this and any other remarkable occurrence at Llantrisant.

CHAPTER II

ODOURS OF PARADISE

I went down to Arfon in the very heat and bloom and fragrance of the wonderful summer that they were enjoying there. In London there was no such weather; it rather seemed as if the horror and fury of the war had mounted to the very skies and were there reigning. In the mornings the sun burnt down upon the city with a heat that scorched and consumed; but then clouds heavy and horrible would roll together from all quarters of the heavens, and early in the afternoon the air would darken, and a storm of thunder and lightning, and furious, hissing rain would fall upon the streets. Indeed, the torment of the world was in the London weather. The city wore a terrible vesture;

within our hearts was dread; without we were clothed in black clouds and angry fire.

It is certain that I cannot show in any words the utter peace of that Welsh coast to which I came; one sees, I think, in such a change a figure of the passage from the disquiets and the fears of earth to the peace of paradise. A land that seemed to be in a holy, happy dream, a sea that changed all the while from olivine to emerald, from emerald to sapphire, from sapphire to amethyst, that washed in white foam at the bases of the firm, grey rocks, and about the huge crimson bastions that hid the western bays and inlets of the waters; to this land I came, and to hollows that were purple and odorous with wild thyme, wonderful with many tiny, exquisite flowers. There was benediction in centaury, pardon in eye-bright, joy in lady's slipper; and so the weary eyes were refreshed, looking now at the little flowers and the happy bees about them, now on the magic mirror of the deep, changing from marvel to marvel with the passing of the great white clouds, with the brightening of the sun. And the ears, torn with jangle and racket and idle, empty noise, were soothed and comforted by the ineffable, unutterable, unceasing murmur, as the tides swam to and fro, uttering mighty, hollow voices in the caverns of the rocks.

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For three or four days I rested in the sun and smelt the savour of the blossoms and of the salt water, and then, refreshed. I remembered that there was something queer about Llantrisant that I might as well investigate. It was no great thing that I thought to find, for, it will be remembered, I had ruled out the apparent oddity of the reporter's—or commissioner's?—reference to lights, on the ground that he must have been referring to some local panic about signalling to the enemy; who had certainly torpedoed a ship or two off Lundy in the Bristol Channel. All that I had to go upon was the reference to the "remarkable occurrences" at some revival, and then that letter of Jackson's, which spoke of Llantrisant church as "reeking" with incense, a wholly incredible and impossible state of things. Why, old Mr. Evans, the rector, looked upon coloured stoles as the very robe of Satan and his angels, as things dear to the heart of the Pope of Rome. But as to incense! As I have already familiarly observed, I knew better.

But as a hard matter of fact, this may be worth noting: when I went over to Llantrisant on Monday, August 9th, I visited

the church, and it was still fragrant and exquisite with the odour of rare gums that had fumed there.

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Now I happened to have a slight acquaintance with the rector. He was a most courteous and delightful old man, and on my last visit he had come across me in the churchyard, as I was admiring the very fine Celtic cross that stands there. Besides the beauty of the interlaced ornament there is an inscription in Ogham on one of the edges, concerning which the learned dispute; it is altogether one of the more famous crosses of Celtdom. Mr. Evans, I say, seeing me looking at the cross, came up and began to give me, the stranger, a résumé—somewhat of a shaky and uncertain résumé, I found afterwards—of the various debates and questions that had arisen as to the exact meaning of the inscription, and I was amused to detect an evident but underlying belief of his own: that the supposed Ogham characters were, in fact, due to boys' mischief and weather and the passing of the ages. But then I happened to put a question as to the sort of stone of which the cross was made, and the rector brightened amazingly. He began to talk geology, and, I think, demonstrated that the cross or the material for it must have been brought to Llantrisant from the south-west coast of Ireland. This struck me as interesting, because it was curious evidence of the migrations of the Celtic saints, whom the rector, I was delighted to find, looked upon as good Protestants though shaky on the subject of crosses; and so, with concessions on my part, we got on very well. Thus, with all this to the good, I was emboldened to call upon him.

I found him altered. Not that he was aged; indeed, he was rather made young, with a singular brightening upon his face, and something of joy upon it that I had not seen before, that I have seen on very few faces of men. We talked of the war, of course, since that is not to be avoided; of the farming prospects of the county; of general things, till I ventured to remark that I had been in the church, and had been surprised to find it perfumed with incense.

"You have made some alterations in the service since I was here last? You use incense now?"

The old man looked at me strangely, and hesitated.

"No," he said, "there has been no change. I use no incense in the church. I should not venture to do so."

"But," I was beginning, "the whole church is as if High Mass had just been sung there, and——"

He cut me short, and there was a certain grave solemnity in his manner that struck me almost with awe.

"I know you are a railer," he said, and the phrase coming from this mild old gentleman astonished me unutterably. "You are a railer and a bitter railer; I have read articles that you have written, and I know your contempt and your hatred for those you call Protestants in your derision; though your grandfather, the vicar of Caerleon-on-Usk, called himself Protestant and was proud of it, and your great-grand-uncle Hezekiah, *ffeiriad coch yr Castletown*—the Red Priest of Castletown—was a great man with the Methodists in his day, and the people flocked by their thousands when he administered the Sacrament. I was born and brought up in Glamorganshire, and old men have wept as they told me of the weeping and contrition that there was when the Red Priest broke the Bread and raised the Cup. But you are a railer, and see nothing but the outside and the show. You are not worthy of this mystery that has been done here."

I went out from his presence rebuked indeed, and justly rebuked; but rather amazed. It is curiously true that the Welsh are still one people, one family almost, in a manner that the English cannot understand, but I had never thought that this old clergyman would have known anything of my ancestry or their doings. And as for my articles and such-like, I kew that the country clergy sometimes read, but I had fancied my pronouncements sufficiently obscure, even in London, much more in Arfon.

But so it happened, and so I had no explanation from the rector of Llantrisant of the strange circumstance, that his church was full of incense and odours of paradise.

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I went up and down the ways of Llantrisant wondering, and came to the harbour, which is a little place, with little quays where some small coasting trade still lingers. A brigantine was at anchor here, and very lazily in the sunshine they were loading it with anthracite; for it is one of the oddities of Llantrisant that there is a small colliery in the heart of the wood on the hillside. I crossed a causeway which parts the outer harbour from the inner harbour, and settled down on a rocky beach hidden under

a leafy hill. The tide was going out, and some children were playing on the wet sand, while two ladies—their mothers, I suppose—talked together as they sat comfortably on their rugs at a little distance from me.

At first they talked of the war, and I made myself deaf, for of that talk one gets enough, and more than enough, in London. Then there was a period of silence, and the conversation had passed to quite a different topic when I caught the thread of it again. I was sitting on the further side of a big rock, and I do not think that the two ladies had noticed my approach. However, though they spoke of strange things, they spoke of nothing which made it necessary for me to announce my presence.

"And, after all," one of them was saying, "what is it all about! I can't make out what is come to the people."

This speaker was a Welshwoman; I recognised the clear, over-emphasised consonants, and a faint suggestion of an accent. Her friend came from the Midlands, and it turned out that they had only known each other for a few days. Theirs was a friendship of the beach and of bathing; such friendships are common at small seaside places.

"There is certainly something odd about the people here. I have never been to Llantrisant before, you know; indeed, this is the first time we've been in Wales for our holidays, and knowing nothing about the ways of the people and not being accustomed to hear Welsh spoken, I thought, perhaps, it must be my imagination. But you think there really is something a little queer?"

"I can tell you this: that I have been in two minds whether I should not write to my husband and ask him to take me and the children away. You know where I am at Mrs. Morgan's, and the Morgans' sitting-room is just the other side of the passage, and sometimes they leave the door open, so that I can hear what they say quite plainly. And you see I understand the Welsh, though they don't know it. And I hear them saying the most alarming things!"

"What sort of things?"

"Well, indeed, it sounds like some kind of a religious service, but it's not Church of England, I know that. Old Morgan begins it, and the wife and children answer. Something like: 'Blessed be God for the messengers of Paradise.' 'Blessed be His Name for Paradise in the meat and in the drink.' 'Thanksgiving for the old offering.' 'Thanksgiving for the appearance of the old altar.' 'Praise for the joy of the ancient garden.' 'Praise for the

return of those that have been long absent.' And all that sort of thing. It is nothing but madness."

"Depend upon it," said the lady from the Midlands, "there's no real harm in it. They're Dissenters; some new sect, I daresay. You know some Dissenters are very queer in their ways."

"All that is like no Dissenters that I have ever known in all my life whatever," replied the Welsh lady somewhat vehemently, with a very distinct intonation of the land. "And have you heard them speak of the bright light that shone at midnight from the church?"

CHAPTER III

A SECRET IN A SECRET PLACE

Now here was I altogether at a loss and quite bewildered. The children broke into the conversation of the two ladies and cut it all short, just as the midnight lights from the church came on the field, and when the little girls and boys went back again to the sand whooping, the tide of talk had turned, and Mrs. Harland and Mrs. Williams were quite safe and at home with Janey's measles, and a wonderful treatment for infantile earache, as exemplified in the case of Trevor. There was no more to be got out of them, evidently, so I left the beach, crossed the harbour causeway, and drank beer at the "Fishermen's Rest" till it was time to climb up two miles of deep lane and catch the train for Penvro, where I was staying. And I went up the lane, as I say, in a kind of amazement; and not so much, I think, because of evidences and hints of things strange to the senses, such as the savour of incense where no incense had smoked for three hundred and fifty years and more, or the story of bright light shining from the dark, closed church at dead of night, as because of that sentence of thanksgiving "for paradise in meat and in drink."

For the sun went down and the evening fell as I climbed the long hill through the deep woods and the high meadows, and the scent of all the green things rose from the earth and from the heart of the wood, and at a turn of the lane far below was the misty glimmer of the still sea, and from far below its deep murmur sounded as it washed on the little hidden, enclosed bay where Llantrisant stands. And I thought, if there be paradise in meat and in drink, so much the more is there paradise in the scent of the green leaves at evening and in the appearance of

the sea and in the redness of the sky; and there came to me a certain vision of a real world about us all the while, of a language that was only secret because we would not take the trouble to listen to it and discern it.

It was almost dark when I got to the station, and here were the few feeble oil lamps lit, glimmering in that lonely land, where the way is long from farm to farm. The train came on its way, and I got into it; and just as we moved from the station I noticed a group under one of those dim lamps. A woman and her child had got out, and they were being welcomed by a man who had been waiting for them. I had not noticed his face as I stood on the platform, but now I saw it as he pointed down the hill towards Llantrisant, and I think I was almost frightened.

He was a young man, a farmer's son, I would say, dressed in rough brown clothes, and as different from old Mr. Evans, the rector, as one man might be from another. But on his face, as I saw it in the lamplight, there was the like brightening that I had seen on the face of the rector. It was an illuminated face, glowing with an ineffable joy, and I thought it rather gave light to the platform lamp than received light from it. The woman and her child, I inferred, were strangers to the place, and had come to pay a visit to the young man's family. They had looked about them in bewilderment, half alarmed, before they saw him; and then his face was radiant in their sight, and it was easy to see that all their troubles were ended and over. A wayside station and a darkening country; and it was as if they were welcomed by shining, immortal gladness—even into paradise.

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But though there seemed in a sense light all about my ways, I was myself still quite bewildered. I could see, indeed, that something strange had happened or was happening in the little town hidden under the hill, but there was so far no clue to the mystery, or rather, the clue had been offered to me, and I had not taken it, I had not even known that it was there; since we do not so much as see what we have determined, without judging, to be incredible, even though it be held up before our eyes. The dialogue that the Welsh Mrs. Williams had reported to her English friend might have set me on the right way; but the right way was outside all my limits of possibility, outside the circle of my thought. The palæontologist might see monstrous, significant marks in the slime of a river bank, but he would never

draw the conclusions that his own peculiar science would seem to suggest to him; he would choose any explanation rather than the obvious, since the obvious would also be the outrageous—according to our established habit of thought, which we deem final.

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The next day I took all these strange things with me for consideration to a certain place that I knew of not far from Penvro. I was now in the early stages of the jig-saw process, or rather I had only a few pieces before me, and—to continue the figure—my difficulty was this: that though the markings on each piece seemed to have design and significance, yet I could not make the wildest guess as to the nature of the whole picture, of which these were the parts. I had clearly seen that there was a great secret; I had seen that on the face of the young farmer on the platform of Llantrisant station; and in my mind there was all the while the picture of him going down the dark, steep, winding lane that led to the town and the sea, going down through the heart of the wood, with light about him.

But there was bewilderment in the thought of this, and in the endeavour to match it with the perfumed church and the scraps of talk that I had heard and the rumour of midnight brightness; and though Penvro is by no means populous, I thought I would go to a certain solitary place called the Old Camp Head, which looks towards Cornwall and to the great deeps that roll beyond Cornwall to the far ends of the world; a place where fragments of dreams—they seemed such then—might, perhaps, be gathered into the clearness of vision.

It was some years since I had been to the Head, and I had gone on that last time and on a former visit by the cliffs, a rough and difficult path. Now I chose a landward way, which the county map seemed to justify, though doubtfully, as regarded the last part of the journey. So I went inland and climbed the hot summer by-roads, till I came at last to a lane which gradually turned turfy and grass-grown, and then on high ground, ceased to be. It left me at a gate in a hedge of old thorns; and across the field beyond there seemed to be some faint indications of a track. One would judge that sometimes men did pass by that way, but not often.

It was high ground but not within sight of the sea. But the breath of the sea blew about the hedge of thorns, and came with a

keen savour to the nostrils. The ground sloped gently from the gate and then rose again to a ridge, where a white farmhouse stood all alone. I passed by this farmhouse, threading an uncertain way, followed a hedgerow doubtfully; and saw suddenly before me the Old Camp, and beyond it the sapphire plain of waters and the mist where sea and sky met. Steep from my feet the hill fell away, a land of gorse-blossom, red-gold and mellow, of glorious purple heather. It fell into a hollow that went down, shining with rich green bracken, to the glimmering sea; and before me and beyond the hollow rose a height of turf, bastioned at the summit with the awful, age-old walls of the Old Camp; green, rounded circumvallations, wall within wall, tremendous, with their myriad years upon them.

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Within these smoothed, green mounds, looking across the shining and changing of the waters in the happy sunlight, I took out the bread and cheese and beer that I had carried in a bag, and ate and drank, and lit my pipe, and set myself to think over the enigmas of Llantrisant. And I had scarcely done so when, a good deal to my annoyance, a man came climbing up over the green ridges and took up his stand close by, and stared out to sea. He nodded to me, and began with "Fine weather for the harvest" in the approved manner, and so sat down and engaged me in a net of talk. He was of Wales, it seemed, but from a different part of the country, and was staying for a few days with relations—at the white farmhouse which I had passed on my way. His tale of nothing flowed on to his pleasure and my pain, till he fell suddenly on Llantrisant and its doings. I listened then with wonder, and here is his tale condensed. Though it must be clearly understood that the man's evidence was only second-hand; he had heard it from his cousin, the farmer.

So, to be brief, it appeared that there had been a long feud at Llantrisant between a local solicitor, Lewis Prothero (we will say), and a farmer named James. There had been a quarrel about some trifle, which had grown more and more bitter as the two parties forgot the merits of the original dispute, and by some means or other, which I could not well understand, the lawyer had got the small freeholder "under his thumb." James, I think, had given a bill of sale in a bad season, and Prothero had bought it up; and the end was that the farmer was turned out of the old house, and was lodging in a cottage. People said

he would have to take a place on his own farm as a labourer; he went about in dreadful misery, piteous to see. It was thought by some that he might very well murder the lawyer, if he met him.

They did meet, in the middle of the market-place at Llantrisant one Saturday in June. The farmer was a little black man, and he gave a shout of rage, and the people were rushing at him to keep him off Prothero.

"And then," said my informant, "I will tell you what happened. This lawyer as they tell me, he is a great big brawny fellow, with a big jaw and a wide mouth, and a red face and red whiskers. And there he was in his black coat and his high hard hat, and all his money at his back, as you may say. And, indeed, he did fall down on his knees in the dust there in the street in front of Philip James, and every one could see that terror was upon him. And he did beg Philip James's pardon, and beg of him to have mercy, and he did implore him by God and man and the saints of paradise. And my cousin, John Jenkins, Penmawr, he do tell me that the tears were falling from Lewis Prothero's eyes like the rain. And he put his hand into his pocket and drew out the deed of Pantyreos, Philip James's old farm that was, and did give him the farm back and a hundred pounds for the stock that was on it, and two hundred pounds, all in notes of the bank, for amendment and consolation.

"And then, from what they do tell me, all the people did go mad, crying and weeping and calling out all manner of things at the top of their voices. And at last nothing would do but they must all go up to the churchyard, and there Philip James and Lewis Prothero they swear friendship to one another for a long age before the old cross, and everyone sings praises. And my cousin he do declare to me that there were men standing in that crowd that he did never see before in Llantrisant in all his life, and his heart was shaken within him as if it had been in a whirlwind."

I had listened to all this in silence. I said then:

"What does your cousin mean by that? Men that he had never seen in Llantrisant? What men?"

"The people," he said very slowly, "call them the Fishermen."

And suddenly there came into my mind the "Rich Fisherman" who in the old legend guards the holy mystery of the Graal.

CHAPTER IV

THE RINGING OF THE BELL

So far I have not told the story of the things of Llantrisant, but rather the story of how I stumbled upon them and among them, perplexed and wholly astray, seeking, but yet not knowing at all what I sought; bewildered now and again by circumstances which seemed to me wholly inexplicable; devoid, not so much of the key to the enigma, but of the key to the nature of the enigma. You cannot begin to solve a puzzle till you know what the puzzle is about. "Yards divided by minutes," said the mathematical master to me long ago, "will give neither pigs, sheep, nor oxen." He was right; though his manner on this and on all other occasions was highly offensive. This is enough of the personal process, as I may call it; and there follows the story of what happened at Llantrisant last summer, the story as I pieced it together at last.

It all began, it appears, on a hot day, early in last June; so far as I can make out, on the first Saturday in the month. There was a deaf old woman, a Mrs. Parry, who lived by herself in a lonely cottage a mile or so from the town. She came into the market-place early on the Saturday morning in a state of some excitement, and as soon as she had taken up her usual place on the pavement by the churchyard, with her ducks and eggs and a few very early potatoes, she began to tell her neighbours about her having heard the sound of a great bell. The good women on each side smiled at one another behind Mrs. Parry's back, for one had to bawl into her ear before she could make out what one meant; and Mrs. Williams, Penycoed, bent over and yelled: "What bell should that be, Mrs. Parry? There's no church near you up at Penrhiw. Do you hear what nonsense she talks?" said Mrs. Williams in a low voice to Mrs. Morgan. "As if she could hear any bell, whatever."

"What makes you talk nonsense yourself?" said Mrs. Parry, to the amazement of the two women. "I can hear a bell as well as you, Mrs. Williams, and as well as your whispers either."

And there is the fact, which is not to be disputed; though the deductions from it may be open to endless disputations; this old woman who had been all but stone deaf for twenty years—the defect had always been in her family—could suddenly hear on this June morning as well as anybody else. And her two old

friends stared at her, and it was some time before they had appeased her indignation, and induced her to talk about the bell.

It had happened in the early morning, which was very misty. She had been gathering sage in her garden, high on a round hill looking over the sea. And there came in her ears a sort of throbbing and singing and trembling, "as if there were music coming out of the earth," and then something seemed to break in her head, and all the birds began to sing and make melody together, and the leaves of the poplars round the garden fluttered in the breeze that rose from the sea, and the cock crowed far off at Twyn, and the dog barked down in Kemeys Valley. But above all these sounds, unheard for so many years, there thrilled the deep and chanting note of the bell, "like a bell and a man's voice singing at once."

They stared again at her and at one another. "Where did it sound from?" asked one. "It came sailing across the sea," answered Mrs. Parry quite composedly, "and I did hear it coming nearer and nearer to the land."

"Well, indeed, said Mrs. Morgan, "it was a ship's bell then, though I can't make out why they would be ringing like that."

"It was not ringing on any ship, Mrs. Morgan," said Mrs. Parry.

"Then where do you think it was ringing?"

"Ym Mharadwys," replied Mrs. Parry. Now that means "in Paradise," and the two others changed the conversation quickly. They thought that Mrs. Parry had got back her hearing suddenly —such things did happen now and then—and that the shock had made her "a bit queer." And this explanation would no doubt have stood its ground, if it had not been for other experiences. Indeed, the local doctor who had treated Mrs. Parry for a dozen years, not for her deafness, which he took to be hopeless and beyond cure, but for a tiresome and recurrent winter cough, sent an account of the case to a colleague at Bristol, suppressing, naturally enough, the reference to Paradise. The Bristol physician gave it as his opinion that the symptoms were absolutely what might have been expected, "You have here, in all probability," he wrote, "the sudden breaking down of an old obstruction in the aural passage, and I should quite expect this process to be accompanied by tinnitus of a pronounced and even violent character."

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But for the other experiences? As the morning wore on and drew to noon, high market, and to the utmost brightness of that summer day, all the stalls and the streets were full of rumours and of awed faces. Now from one lonely farm, now from another, men and women came and told the story of how they had listened in the early morning with thrilling hearts to the thrilling music of a bell that was like no bell ever heard before. And it seemed that many people in the town had been roused, they knew not how, from sleep; waking up, as one of them said, as if bells were ringing and the organ playing, and a choir of sweet voices singing all together: "There were such melodies and songs that my heart was full of joy."

And a little past noon some fishermen who had been out all night returned, and brought a wonderful story into the town of what they had heard in the mist; and one of them said he had seen something go by at a little distance from his boat. "It was all golden and bright," he said, "and there was glory about it." Another fisherman declared "there was a song upon the water that was like heaven."

And here I would say in parenthesis that on returning to town I sought out a very old friend of mine, a man who has devoted a lifetime to strange and esoteric studies. I thought that I had a tale that would interest him profoundly, but I found that he heard me with a good deal of indifference. And at this very point of the sailors' stories I remember saying: "Now what do you make of that? Don't you think it's extremely curious?" He replied: "I hardly think so. Possibly the sailors were lying; possibly it happened as they say. Well; that sort of thing has always been happening." I give my friend's opinion; I make no comment on it.

Let it be noted that there was something remarkable as to the manner in which the sound of the bell was heard—or supposed to be heard. There are, no doubt, mysteries in sound as in all else; indeed, I am informed that during one of the horrible outrages that have been perpetrated on London during this autumn there was an instance of a great block of workmen's dwellings in which the only person who heard the crash of a particular bomb falling was an old deaf woman, who had been fast asleep till the moment of the explosion. This is strange enough of a sound that was entirely in the natural (and horrible) order; and so it was at Llantrisant, where the sound was either a collective auditory hallucination or a manifestation of

what is conveniently, if inaccurately, called the supernatural order.

For the thrill of the bell did not reach to all ears—or hearts. Deaf Mrs. Parry heard it in her lonely cottage garden, high above the misty sea; but then, in a farm on the other or western side of Llantrisant, a little child, scarcely three years old, was the only one out of a household of ten people who heard anything. He called out in stammering baby Welsh something that sounded like "Clychau fawr, clychau fawr"—the great bells, the great bells—and his mother wondered what he was talking about. Of the crews of half a dozen trawlers that were swinging from side to side in the mist, not more than four men had any tale to tell. And so it was that for an hour or two the man who had heard nothing suspected his neighbour who had heard marvels of lying; and it was some time before the mass of evidence coming from all manner of diverse and remote quarters convinced the people that there was a true story here. A might suspect B, his neighbour, of making up a tale; but when C, from some place on the hills five miles away, and D, the fisherman on the waters, each had a like report, then it was clear that something had happened.

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And even then, as they told me, the signs to be seen upon the people were stranger than the tales told by them and among them. It has struck me that many people in reading some of the phrases that I have reported will dismiss them with laughter as very poor and fantastic inventions; fishermen, they will say, do not speak of "a song like heaven" or of "glory about it." And I dare say this would be a just enough criticism if I were reporting English fishermen; but, odd though it may be, Wales has not yet lost the last shreds of the grand manner. And let it be remembered also that in most cases such phrases are translated from another language, that is, from the Welsh.

So, they come trailing, let us say, fragments of the cloud of glory in their common speech; and so, on this Saturday, they began to display, uneasily enough in many cases, their consciousness that the things that were reported were of their ancient right and former custom. The comparison is not quite fair; but conceive Hardy's old Durbeyfield suddenly waking from long slumber to find himself in a noble thirteenth-century hall,

waited on by kneeling pages, smiled on by sweet ladies in silken côtehardies.

So by evening time there had come to the old people the recollection of stories that their fathers had told them as they sat round the hearth of winter nights, fifty, sixty, seventy years ago; stories of the wonderful bell of Teilo Sant, that had sailed across the glassy seas from Syon, that was called a portion of Paradise, "and the sound of its ringing was like the perpetual choir of the angels."

Such things were remembered by the old and told to the young that evening, in the streets of the town and in the deep lanes that climbed far hills. The sun went down to the mountain red with fire like a burnt offering, the sky turned violet, the sea was purple, as one told another of the wonder that had returned to the land after long ages.

CHAPTER V

THE ROSE OF FIRE

It was during the next nine days, counting from that Saturday early in June—the first Saturday in June, as I believe—that Llantrisant and all the regions about became possessed either by an extraordinary set of hallucinations or by a visitation of great marvels.

This is not the place to strike the balance between the two possibilities. The evidence is, no doubt, readily available; the matter is open to systematic investigation.

But this may be said: The ordinary man, in the ordinary passages of his life, accepts in the main the evidence of his senses, and is entirely right in doing so. He says that he sees a cow, that he sees a stone wall, and that the cow and the stone wall are "there." This is very well for all the practical purposes of life, but I believe that the metaphysicians are by no means so easily satisfied as to the reality of the stone wall and the cow. Perhaps they might allow that both objects are "there" in the sense that one's reflection is in a glass; there is an actuality, but is there a reality external to oneself? In any event, it is solidly agreed that, supposing a real existence, this much is certain—it is not in the least like our conception of it. The ant and the microscope will quickly convince us that we do not see things

as they really are, even supposing that we see them at all. If we could "see" the real cow she would appear utterly incredible, as incredible as the things I am to relate.

Now, there is nothing that I know much more unconvincing than the stories of the red light on the sea. Several sailors, men on small coasting ships, who were working up or down the Channel on that Saturday night, spoke of "seeing" the red light, and it must be said that there is a very tolerable agreement in their tales. All make the time as between midnight of the Saturday and one o'clock on the Sunday morning. Two of those sailormen are precise as to the time of the apparition; they fix it by elaborate calculations of their own as occurring at 12.20 a.m. And the story?

A red light, a burning spark seen far away in the darkness, taken at the first moment of seeing for a signal, and probably an enemy signal. Then it approached at a tremendous speed, and one man said he took it to be the port light of some new kind of navy motor-boat which was developing a rate hitherto unheard of, a hundred or a hundred and fifty knots an hour. And then, in the third instant of the sight, it was clear that this was no earthly speed. At first a red spark in the farthest distance; then a rushing lamp; and then, as if in an incredible point of time, it swelled into a vast rose of fire that filled all the sea and all the sky and hid the stars and possessed the land. "I thought the end of the world had come," one of the sailors said.

And then, an instant more, and it was gone from them, and four of them say that there was a red spark on Chapel Head, where the old grey chapel of St. Teilo stands, high above the water, in a cleft of the limestone rocks.

And thus the sailors; and thus their tales are incredible; but *they* are not incredible. I believe that men of the highest eminence in physical science have testified to the occurrence of phenomena every whit as marvellous, to things as absolutely opposed to all natural order, as we conceive it; and it may be said that nobody minds them. "That sort of thing has always been happening," as my friend remarked to me. But the men, whether or no the fire had ever been without them, there was no doubt that it was now within them, for it burned in their eyes. They were purged as if they had passed through the Furnace of the Sages, governed with Wisdom that the alchemists know. They spoke without much difficulty of what they had seen, or had seemed to see, with their eyes, but hardly at all of what their

hearts had known when for a moment the glory of the fiery rose had been about them.

For some weeks afterwards they were still, as it were, amazed; almost, I would say, incredulous. If there had been nothing more than the splendid and fiery appearance, showing and vanishing, I do believe that they themselves would have discredited their own senses and denied the truth of their own tales. And one does not dare to say whether they would not have been right. Men like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge are certainly to be heard with respect, and they bear witness to all manner of apparent eversions of laws which we, or most of us, consider far more deeply founded than the ancient hills. They may be justified; but in our hearts we doubt. We cannot wholly believe in inner sincerity that the solid table did rise, without mechanical reason or cause, into the air, and so defy that which we name the "law of gravitation." I know what may be said on the other side; I know that there is no true question of "law" in the case; that the law of gravitation really means just this: that I have never seen a table rising without mechanical aid, or an apple, detached from the bough, soaring to the skies instead of falling to the ground. The so-called law is just the sum of common observation and nothing more; yet I say, in our hearts we do not believe that the tables rise; much less do we believe in the rose of fire that for a moment swallowed up the skies and seas and shores of the Welsh coast last June.

And the men who saw it would have invented fairy tales to account for it, I say again, if it had not been for that which was within them.

They said, all of them, and it was certain now that they spoke the truth, that in the moment of the vision, every pain and ache and malady in their bodies had passed away. One man had been vilely drunk on venomous spirit, procured at "Jobson's Hole" down by the Cardiff Docks. He was horribly ill; he had crawled up from his bunk for a little fresh air; and in an instant his horrors and his deadly nausea had left him. Another man was almost desperate with the raging hammering pain of an abscess on a tooth; he says that when the red flame came near he felt as if a dull, heavy blow had fallen on his jaw, and then the pain was quite gone; he could scarcely believe that there had been any pain there.

And they all bear witness to an extraordinary exaltation of the senses. It is indescribable, this; for they cannot describe it. They

are amazed, again; they do not in the least profess to know what happened; but there is no more possibility of shaking their evidence than there is a possibility of shaking the evidence of a man who says that water is wet and fire hot.

"I felt a bit queer afterwards," said one of them, "and I steadied myself by the mast, and I can't tell how I felt as I touched it. I didn't know that touching a thing like a mast could be better than a big drink when you're thirsty, or a soft pillow when you're sleepy."

I heard other instances of this state of things, as I must vaguely call it, since I do not know what else to call it. But I suppose we can all agree that to the man in average health, the average impact of the external world on his senses is a matter of indifference. The average impact; a harsh scream, the bursting of a motor tyre, any violent assault on the aural nerves will annoy him, and he may say "damn." Then, on the other hand, the man who is not "fit" will easily be annoyed and irritated by someone pushing past him in a crowd, by the ringing of a bell, by the sharp closing of a book.

But so far as I could judge from the talk of these sailors, the average impact of the external world had become to them a fountain of pleasure. Their nerves were on edge, but an edge to receive exquisite sensuous impressions. The touch of the rough mast, for example; that was a joy far greater than is the joy of fine silk to some luxurious skins; they drank water and stared as if they had been *fins gourmets* tasting an amazing wine; the creak and whine of their ship on its slow way were as exquisite as the rhythm and song of a Bach fugue to an amateur of music.

And then, within; these rough fellows have their quarrels and strifes and variances and envyings like the rest of us; but that was all over between them that had seen the rosy light; old enemies shook hands heartily, and roared with laughter as they confessed one to another what fools they had been.

"I can't exactly say how it has happened or what has happened at all," said one, "but if you have all the world and the glory of it, how can you fight for fivepence?"

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The church of Llantrisant is a typical example of a Welsh parish church, before the evil and horrible period of "restoration."

This lower world is a palace of lies, and of all foolish lies there

is none more insane than a certain vague fable about the mediæval freemasons, a fable which somehow imposed itself upon the cold intellect of Hallam the historian. The story is, in brief, that throughout the Gothic period, at any rate, the art and craft of church building were executed by wandering guilds of "free-masons," possessed of various secrets of building and adornment, which they employed wherever they went. If this nonsense were true, the Gothic of Cologne would be as the Gothic of Colne, and the Gothic of Arles like to the Gothic of Abingdon. It is so grotesquely untrue that almost every county, let alone every country, has its distinctive style in Gothic architecture. Arfon is in the west of Wales; its churches have marks and features which distinguish them from the churches in the east of Wales.

The Llantrisant church has that primitive division between nave and chancel which only very foolish people decline to recognise as equivalent to the Oriental iconostasis and as the origin of the Western rood-screen. A solid wall divided the church into two portions; in the centre was a narrow opening with a rounded arch, through which those who sat towards the middle of the church could see the small, red-carpeted altar and the three roughly shaped lancet windows above it.

The "reading pew" was on the outer side of this wall of partition, and here the rector did his service, the choir being grouped in seats about him. On the inner side were the pews of certain privileged houses of the town and district.

On the Sunday morning the people were all in their accustomed places, not without a certain exultation in their eyes, not without a certain expectation of they knew not what. The bells stopped ringing, the rector, in his old-fashioned, ample surplice, entered the reading-desk, and gave out the hymn: "My God, and is Thy Table spread."

And, as the singing began, all the people who were in the pews within the wall came out of them and streamed through the arch-way into the nave. They took what places they could find up and down the church, and the rest of the congregation looked at them in amazement.

Nobody knew what had happened. Those whose seats were next to the aisle tried to peer into the chancel, to see what had happened or what was going on there. But somehow the light flamed so brightly from the windows above the altar, those being the only windows in the chancel, one small lancet in the south wall excepted, that no one could see anything at all.

"It was as if a veil of gold adorned with jewels was hanging there," one man said; and indeed there are a few odds and scraps of old painted glass left in the eastern lancets.

But there were few in the church who did not hear now and again voices speaking beyond the veil.

CHAPTER VI

OLWEN'S DREAM

The well-to-do and dignified personages who left their pews in the chancel of Llantrisant Church and came hurrying into the nave could give no explanation of what they had done. They felt, they said, that they "had to go," and to go quickly; they were driven out, as it were, by a secret, irresistible command. But all who were present in the church that morning were amazed, though all exulted in their hearts; for they, like the sailors who saw the rose of fire on the waters, were filled with a joy that was literally ineffable, since they could not utter it or interpret it to themselves.

And they too, like the sailors, were transmuted, or the world was transmuted for them. They experienced what the doctors call a sense of *bien être,* but a *bien être* raised to the highest power. Old men felt young again, eyes that had been growing dim now saw clearly, and saw a world that was like Paradise, the same world, it is true, but a world rectified and glowing, as if an inner flame shone in all things, and behind all things.

And the difficulty in recording this state is this, that it is so rare an experience that no set language to express it is in existence. A shadow of its raptures and ecstasies is found in the highest poetry; there are phrases in ancient books telling of the Celtic saints that dimly hint at it; some of the old Italian masters of painting had known it, for the light of it shines in their skies and about the battlements of their cities that are founded on magic hills. But these are but broken hints.

It is not poetic to go to Apothecaries' Hall for similes. But for many years I kept by me an article from the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*—I forget which—in which a doctor gave an account of certain experiments he had conducted with a drug called the Mescal Button, or Anhelonium Lewinii. He said that while under the influence of the drug he had but to shut his eyes, and immediately before him there would rise incredible Gothic cathe-

drals, of such majesty and splendour and glory that no heart had ever conceived. They seemed to surge from the depths to the very heights of heaven, their spires swayed amongst the clouds and the stars, they were fretted with admirable imagery. And as he gazed, he would presently become aware that all the stones were living stones, that they were quickening and palpitating, and then that they were glowing jewels, say, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, opals, but of hues that the mortal eye had never seen.

That description gives, I think, some faint notion of the nature of the transmuted world into which these people by the sea had entered, a world quickened and glorified and full of pleasures. Joy and wonder were on all faces; but the deepest joy and the greatest wonder were on the face of the rector. For he had heard through the veil the Greek word for "holy," three times repeated.

And he, who had once been a horrified assistant at High Mass in a foreign church, recognised the perfume of incense that filled the place from end to end.

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It was on that Sunday night that Olwen Phillips of Croeswen dreamed her wonderful dream. She was a girl of sixteen, the daughter of small farming people, and for many months she had been doomed to certain death. Consumption, which flourishes in that damp, warm climate, had laid hold of her; not only her lungs but her whole system was a mass of tuberculosis. As is common enough, she had enjoyed many fallacious brief recoveries in the early stages of the disease, but all hope had long been over, and now for the last few weeks she had seemed to rush vehemently to death. The doctor had come on the Saturday morning, bringing with him a colleague. They had both agreed that the girl's case was in its last stages. "She cannot possibly last more than a day or two," said the local doctor to her mother. He came again on the Sunday morning and found his patient perceptibly worse, and soon afterwards she sank into a heavy sleep, and her mother thought that she would never wake from it.

The girl slept in an inner room communicating with the room occupied by her father and mother. The door between was kept open, so that Mrs. Phillips could hear her daughter if she called to her in the night. And Olwen called to her mother that night, just as the dawn was breaking. It was no faint summons from

a dying bed that came to the mother's ears, but a loud cry that rang through the house, a cry of great gladness. Mrs. Phillips started up from sleep in wild amazement, wondering what could have happened. And then she saw Olwen, who had not been able to rise from her bed for many weeks past, standing in the doorway in the faint light of the growing day. The girl called to her mother: "Mam! mam! It is all over. I am quite well again."

Mrs. Phillips roused her husband, and they sat up in bed staring, not knowing on earth, as they said afterwards, what had been done with the world. Here was their poor girl wasted to a shadow, lying on her death-bed, and the life sighing from her with every breath, and her voice, when she last uttered it, so weak that one had to put one's ear to her mouth. And here in a few hours she stood up before them; and even in that faint light they could see that she was changed almost beyond knowing. And, indeed, Mrs. Phillips said that for a moment or two she fancied that the Germans must have come and killed them in their sleep, and so they were all dead together. But Olwen called out again, so the mother lit a candle and got up and went tottering across the room, and there was Olwen all gay and plump again, smiling with shining eyes. Her mother led her into her own room, and set down the candle there, and felt her daughter's flesh, and burst into prayers and tears of wonder and delight, and thanksgivings, and held the girl again to be sure that she was not deceived. And then Olwen told her dream, though she thought it was not a dream.

She said she woke up in the deep darkness, and she knew the life was fast going from her. She could not move so much as a finger, she tried to cry out, but no sound came from her lips. She felt that in another instant the whole world would fall from her—her heart was full of agony. And as the last breath was passing her lips, she heard a very faint, sweet sound, like the tinkling of a silver bell. It came from far away, from over by Ty-newydd. She forgot her agony and listened, and even then, she says, she felt the swirl of the world as it came back to her. And the sound of the bell swelled and grew louder, and it thrilled all through her body, and the life was in it. And as the bell rang and trembled in her ears, a faint light touched the wall of her room and reddened, till the whole room was full of rosy fire. And then she saw standing before her bed three men in blood-coloured robes with shining faces. And one man held a golden bell in his hand. And the second man held up something shaped

like the top of a table. It was like a great jewel, and it was of a blue colour, and there were rivers of silver and of gold running through it and flowing as quick streams flow, and there were pools in it as if violets had been poured out into water, and then it was green as the sea near the shore, and then it was the sky at night with all the stars shining, and then the sun and the moon came down and washed in it. And the third man held up high above this a cup that was like a rose on fire; "there was a great burning in it, and a dropping of blood in it, and a red cloud above it, and I saw a great secret. And I heard a voice that sang nine times, 'Glory and praise to the Conqueror of Death, to the Fountain of Life immortal.' Then the red light went from the wall, and it was all darkness, and the bell rang faint again by Capel Teilo, and then I got up and called to you."

The doctor came on the Monday morning with the death certificate in his pocket-book, and Olwen ran out to meet him. I have quoted his phrase in the first chapter of this record: "A kind of resurrection of the body." He made a most careful examination of the girl; he has stated that he found that every trace of disease had disappeared. He left on the Sunday morning a patient entering into the coma that precedes death, a body condemned utterly and ready for the grave. He met at the garden gate on the Monday morning a young woman in whom life sprang up like a fountain, in whose body life laughed and rejoiced as if it had been a river flowing from an unending well.

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Now this is the place to ask one of those questions—there are many such—which cannot be answered. The question is as to the continuance of tradition; more especially as to the continuance of tradition among the Welsh Celts of to-day. On the one hand, such waves and storms have gone over them. The wave of the heathen Saxons went over them, then the wave of Latin mediævalism, then the waters ofAnglicanism; last of all the flood of their queer Calvinistic Methodism, half Puritan, half pagan. It may well be asked whether any memory can possibly have survived such a series of deluges. I have said that the old people of Llantrisant had their tales of the Bell of Teilo Sant; but these were but vague and broken recollections. And then there is the name by which the "strangers" who were seen in the marketplace were known; that is more precise. Students of the Graal legend know that the keeper of the Graal in the romances is the

"King Fisherman," or the "Rich Fisherman"; students of Celtic hagiology know that it was prophesied before the birth of Dewi (or David) that he should be "a man of aquatic life," that another legend tells how a little child, destined to be a saint, was discovered on a stone in the river, how through his childhood a fish for his nourishment was found on that stone every day, while another saint, Ilar, if I remember, was expressly known as "The Fisherman." But has the memory of all this persisted in the church-going and chapel-going people of Wales at the present day? It is difficult to say. There is the affair of the Healing Cup of Nant Eos, or Tregaron Healing Cup, as it is also called. It is only a few years ago since it was shown to a wandering harper, who treated it lightly, and then spent a wretched night, as he said, and came back penitently and was left alone with the sacred vessel to pray over it, till "his mind was at rest." That was in 1887.

Then for my part—I only know modern Wales on the surface, I am sorry to say—I remember three or four years ago speaking to my temporary landlord of certain relics of Saint Teilo, which are supposed to be in the keeping of a particular family in that country. The landlord is a very jovial, merry fellow, and I observed with some astonishment that his ordinary, easy manner was completely altered as he said, gravely, "That will be over there, up by the mountain," pointing vaguely to the north. And he changed the subject, as a Freemason changes the subject.

There the matter lies, and its appositeness to the story of Llantrisant is this: that the dream of Olwen Phillips was, in fact, the Vision of the Holy Graal.

CHAPTER VII

THE MASS OF THE SANGRAAL

"Ffeiriadwyr Melcisidec! Ffeiriadwyr Melcisidec!" shouted the old Calvinistic Methodist deacon with the grey beard. "Priesthood of Melchizedek! Priesthood of Melchizedek!"

And he went on:

"The Bell that is like *y glwys yr angel ym mharadwys*—the joy of the angels in Paradise—is returned; the Altar that is of a colour that no man can discern is returned, the Cup that came from Syon is returned, the ancient Offering is resorted, the Three Saints have come back to the church of the *tri sant, the* Tree Holy Fishermen

are amongst us, and their net is full. *Gogoniant, gogoniant*—glory, glory!"

Then another Methodist began to recite in Welsh a verse from Wesley's hymn.

God still respects Thy sacrifice,
Its savour sweet doth always please;
The offering smokes through earth and skies,
Diffusing life and joy and peace;
To these Thy lower courts it comes
And fills them with Divine perfumes.

The whole church was full, as the old books tell, of the odour of the rarest spiceries. There were lights shining within the sanctuary through the narrow archway.

This was the beginning of the end of what befell at Llantrisant. For it was the Sunday after that night on which Olwen Phillips had been restored from death to life. There was not a single chapel of the Dissenters open in the town that day. The Methodists with their minister and their deacons and all the Nonconformists had returned on this Sunday morning to "the old hive." One would have said, a church of the Middle Ages, a church in Ireland to-day. Every seat—save those in the chancel—was full, all the aisles were full, the churchyard was full; everyone on his knees, and the old rector kneeling before the door into the holy place.

Yet they can say but very little of what was done beyond the veil. There was no attempt to perform the usual service; when the bells had stopped the old deacon raised his cry, and priest and people fell down on their knees as they thought they heard a choir within singing "Alleluya, alleluya, alleluya." And as the bells in the tower ceased ringing, there sounded the thrill of the bell from Syon, and the golden veil of sunlight fell across the door into the altar, and the heavenly voices began their melodies.

A voice like a trumpet cried from within the brightness:

Agyos, Agyos, Agyos.

And the people, as if an age-old memory stirred in them, replied:

Agyos yr Tâd, agyos yr Mab, agyos yr Yspryd Glan. Sant, sant, sant, Drindod sant vendigeid. Sanctus Arglwydd Dduw Sabaoth, Dominus Deus.

There was a voice that cried and sang from within the altar; most of the people had heard sore faint echo of it in the chapels;

a voice rising and falling and soaring in awful modulations that rang like the trumpet of the Last Angel. The people beat upon their breasts, the tears were like rain of the mountains on their cheeks; those that were able fell down flat on their faces before the glory of the veil. They said afterwards that men of the hills, twenty miles away, heard that cry and that singing, roaring upon them on the wind, and they fell down on their faces, and cried, "The offering is accomplished," knowing nothing of what they said.

There were a few who saw three come out of the door of the sanctuary, and stand for a moment on the pace before the door. These three were in dyed vesture, red as blood. One stood before two, looking to the west, and he rang the bell. And they say that all the birds of the wood, and all the waters of the sea, and all the leaves of the trees, and all the winds of the high rocks uttered their voices with the ringing of the bell. And the second and the third; they turned their faces one to another. The second held up the lost altar that they once called *Sapphirus,* which was like the changing of the sea and of the sky, and like the immixture of gold and silver. And the third heaved up high over the altar a cup that was red with burning and the blood of the offering.

And the old rector cried aloud then before the entrance:

Bendigeid yr Offeren yn oes oesoedd—blessed be the Offering unto the ages of ages.

And then the Mass of the Sangraal was ended, and then began the passing out of that land of the holy persons and holy things that had returned to it after the long years. It seemed, indeed, to many that the thrilling sound of the bell was in their ears for days, even for weeks after that Sunday morning. But thenceforth neither bell nor altar nor cup was seen by anyone; not openly, that is, but only in dreams by day and by night. Nor did the people see Strangers again in the market of Llantrisant, nor in the lonely places where certain persons oppressed by great affliction and sorrow had once or twice encountered them.

. . . . . .

But that time of visitation will never be forgotten by the people. Many things happened in the nine days that have not been set down in this record—or legend. Some of them were trifling matters, though strange enough in other times. Thus a man in the town who had a fierce dog that was always kept chained up found one day that the beast had become mild and gentle.

And this is odder: Edward Davies, of Lanafon, a farmer, was roused from sleep one night by a queer yelping and barking in his yard. He looked out of the window and saw his sheep-dog playing with a big fox; they were chasing each other by turns, rolling over and over one another, "cutting such capers as I did never see the like," as the astonished farmer put it. And some of the people said that during this season of wonder the corn shot up and the grass thickened, and the fruit was multiplied on the trees in a very marvellous manner.

More important, it seemed, was the case of Williams, the grocer; though this may have been a purely natural deliverance. Mr. Williams was to marry his daughter Mary to a smart young fellow from Carmarthen, and he was in great distress over it. Not over the marriage itself, but because things had been going very badly with him for some time, and he could not see his way to giving anything like the wedding entertainment that would be expected of him. The wedding was to be on the Saturday—that was the day on which the lawyer, Lewis Prothero, and the farmer, Philip James, were reconciled—and this John Williams, without money or credit, could not think how shame would not be on him for the meagreness and poverty of the wedding feast. And then on the Tuesday came a letter from his brother, David Williams, Australia, from whom he had not heard for fifteen years. And David, it seemed, had been making a great deal of money, and was a bachelor, and here was with his letter a paper good for a thousand pounds: "You may as well enjoy it now as wait till I am dead." This was enough, indeed, one might say; but hardly an hour after the letter had come the lady from the big house (Plas Mawr) drove up in all her grandeur, and went into the shop and said, "Mr. Williams, your daughter Mary has always been a very good girl, and my husband and I feel that we must give her some little thing on her wedding, and we hope she'll be very happy." It was a gold watch worth fifteen pounds. And after Lady Watcyn, advances the old doctor with a dozen of port, forty years upon it, and a long sermon on how to decant it. And the old rector's old wife brings to the beautiful dark girl two yards of creamy lace, like an enchantment, for her wedding veil, and tells Mary how she wore it for her own wedding fifty years ago; and the squire, Sir Watcyn, as if his wife had not been already with a fine gift, calls from his horse, and brings out Williams and barks like a dog at him, "Goin' to have a weddin', eh, Williams? Can't have a weddin' without champagne, y' know; wouldn't be legal,

don't y' know. So look out for a couple of cases." So Williams tells the story of the gifts; and certainly there was never so famous a wedding in Llantrisant before.

All this, of course, may have been altogether in the natural order; the "glow," as they call it, seems more difficult to explain. For they say that all through the nine days, and indeed after the time had ended, there never was a man weary or sick at heart in Llantrisant, or in the country round it. For if a man felt that his work of the body or the mind was going to be too much for his strength, then there would come to him of a sudden a warm glow and a thrilling all over him, and he felt as strong as a giant, and happier than he had ever been in his life before, so that lawyer and hedger each rejoiced in the task that was before him, as if it were sport and play.

And much more wonderful than this or any other wonders was forgiveness, with love to follow it. There were meetings of old enemies in the market-place and in the street that made the people lift up their hands and declare that it was as if one walked the miraculous streets of Syon.

. . . . . .

But as to the "phenomena," the occurrences for which, in ordinary talk, we should reserve the word "miraculous"? Well, what do we know? The question that I have already stated comes up again, as to the possible survival of old tradition in a kind of dormant, or torpid, semi-conscious state. In other words, did the people "see" and "hear" what they expected to see and hear? This point, or one similar to it, occurred in a debate between Andrew Lang and Anatole France as to the visions of Joan of Arc. M. France stated that when Joan saw St. Michael, she saw the traditional archangel of the religious art of her day, but to the best of my belief Andrew Lang proved that the visionary figure Joan described was not in the least like the fifteenth-century conception of St. Michael. So, in the case of Llantrisant, I have stated that there was a sort of tradition about the Holy Bell of Teilo Sant; and it is, of course, barely possible that some vague notion of the Graal Cup may have reached even Welsh country folks through Tennyson's "Idylls." But so far I see no reason to suppose that these people had ever heard of the portable altar (called Sapphirus in William of Malmesbury) or of its changing colours "that no man could discern."

And then there are the other questions of the distinction be-

tween hallucination and vision, of the average duration of one and the other, and of the possibility of collective hallucination. If a number of people all see (or think they see) the same appearances, can this be merely hallucination? I believe there is a leading case on the matter, which concerns a number of people seeing the same appearance on a church wall in Ireland; but there is, of course, this difficulty, that one may be hallucinated and communicate his impression to the others, telepathically.

But at the last, what do we know?

Frederick Marryat

THE STORY OF THE GREEK SLAVE

From *The Pacha of Many Tales*

I am a Greek by birth, my parents were poor people residing at Smyrna. I was an only son, and brought up to my father's profession—that of a cooper. When I was twenty years old, I had buried both my parents, and was left to shift for myself. I had been for some time in the employ of a Jewish wine-merchant, and I continued there for three years after my father's death, when a circumstance occurred which led to my subsequent prosperity and present degradation.

At the time that I am speaking of, I had, by strict diligence and sobriety, so pleased my employer, that I had risen to be his foreman; and although I still superintended and occasionally worked at the cooperage, I was entrusted with the drawing off and fining of the wines, to prepare them for market. There was an Ethiopian slave, who worked under my orders, a powerful, broad-shouldered, and most malignant wretch whom my master found it almost impossible to manage; the bastinado, or any other punishment, he derided, and after the application only became more sullen and discontented than before. The fire that flashed from his eyes, upon any fault being found by me on account of his negligence, was so threatening, that I every day expected I should be murdered. I repeatedly requested my master to part with him;

but the Ethiopian being a very powerful man, and able, when he chose, to move a pipe of wine without assistance, the avarice of the Jew would not permit him to accede to my repeated solicitations.

One morning I entered the cooperage, and found the Ethiopian fast asleep by the side of a cask which I had been wanting for some time, and expected to have found ready. Afraid to punish him myself, I brought my master to witness his conduct. The Jew, enraged at his idleness, struck him on the head with one of the staves. The Ethiopian sprung up in a rage, but on seeing his master with the stave in his hand, contented himself with muttering, "That he would not remain to be beaten in that manner," and re-applied himself to his labour. As soon as my master had left the cooperage, the Ethiopian vented his anger upon me for having informed against him, and seizing the stave, flew at me with the intention of beating out my brains. I stepped behind the cask; he followed me, and just as I had seized an adze to defend myself, he fell over the stool which lay in his way; he was springing up to renew the attack, when I struck him a blow with the adze which entered his skull, and laid him dead at my feet.

I was very much alarmed at what had occurred; for although I felt justified in self-defence, I was aware that my master would be very much annoyed at the loss of the slave, and as there were no witnesses, it would go hard with me when brought before the cadi. After some reflection I determined, as the slave had said "He would not remain to be beaten," that I would leave my master to suppose he had run away, and in the meantime conceal the body. But to effect this was difficult, as I could not take it out of the cooperage without being perceived. After some cogitation, I decided upon putting it into the cask, and heading it up. It required all my strength to lift the body in, but at last I succeeded. Having put in the lead of the pipe, I hammered down the hoops and rolled it into the store, where I had been waiting to fill it with wine for the next year's demand. As soon as it was in its place, I pumped off the wine from the vat, and having filled up the cask and put in the bung, I felt as if a heavy load had been removed from my mind, as there was no chance of immediate discovery.

I had but just completed my task, and was sitting down on one of the settles, when my master came in, and inquired for the slave. I replied that he had left the cooperage, swearing that he would work no more. Afraid of losing him, the Jew hastened to give notice to the authorities, that he might be apprehended; but after

some time, as nothing could be heard of the supposed runaway, it was imagined that he had drowned himself in a fit of sullenness, and no more was thought about him. In the meanwhile I continued to work there as before, and as I had the charge of everything I had no doubt that, some day or another, I should find means of quietly disposing of my incumbrance.

The next spring, I was busy pumping off from one cask into the other, according to our custom, when the aga of the janissaries came in. He was a great wine-bibber, and one of our best customers. As his dependants were all well known, it was not his custom to send them for wine, but to come himself to the store and select a pipe. This was carried away in a litter by eight strong slaves, with the curtains drawn close, as if it had been a new purchase which he had added to his harem. My master showed him the pipes of wine prepared for that year's market, which were arranged in two rows; and I hardly need observe that the one containing the Ethiopian was not in the foremost. After tasting one or two which did not seem to please him, the aga observed, "Friend Issachar, thy tribe will always put off the worst goods first, if possible. Now I have an idea that there is better wine in the second tier, than in the one thou hast recommended. Let thy Greek put a spile into that cask," continued he, pointing to the very one in which I had headed-up the black slave. As I made sure that as soon as he had tasted the contents he would spit them out, I did not hesitate to bore the cask and draw off the wine, which I handed to him. He tasted it, and held it to the light —tasted it again and smacked his lips—then turning to my master, exclaimed, "Thou dog of a Jew! wouldst thou have palmed off upon me vile trash, when thou hadst in thy possession wine which might be sipped with the houris in Paradise?"

The Jew appealed to me if the pipes of wine were not all of the same quality; and I confirmed his assertion.

"Taste it then," replied the aga, "and then taste the first which you recommended to me."

My master did so, and was evidently astonished. "It certainly has more body," replied he; "yet how can that be, I know not. Taste it, Charis." I held the glass to my lips, but nothing could induce me to taste the contents. I contented myself with agreeing with my master, (as I conscientiously could), "that it certainly had more *body* in it than the rest."

The aga was so pleased with the wine, that he tasted two or three more pipes of the back tier, hoping to find others of the same

quality, probably intending to have laid in a large stock; but finding no other of the same flavour, he ordered his slaves to roll the one containing the body of the slave into the litter, and carried it to his own house.

"Stop a moment, thou lying kafir!" said the pacha, "dost thou really mean to say that the wine was better than the rest?"

"Why should I tell a lie to your sublime highness—am I not a worm that you may crush? As I informed you, I did not taste it, your highness; but after the aga had departed, my master expressed his surprise at the excellence of the wine, which he affirmed to be superior to any thing that he had ever tasted—and his sorrow that the aga had taken away the cask, which prevented him from ascertaining the cause. But one day I was narrating the circumstance to a Frank in this country, who expressed no surprise at the wine being improved. He had been a wine-merchant in England, and he informed me that it was the custom there to throw large pieces of raw beef into the wine to feed it; and that some particular wines were very much improved thereby."

"Allah kebur! God is great!" cried the pacha—"Then it must be so—I have heard that the English are very fond of beef. Now go on with thy story."

Your highness cannot imagine the alarm which I felt when the cask was taken away by the aga's slaves. I gave myself up for a lost man, and resolved upon immediate flight from Smyrna. I calculated the time that it would take for the aga to drink the wine, and made my arrangements accordingly. I told my master that it was my intention to leave him, as I had an offer to go into business with a relation at Zante. My master, who could not well do without me, entreated me to stay; but I was positive. He then offered me a share of the business if I would remain, but I was not to be persuaded. Every rap at the door, I thought that the aga and his janissaries were coming for me; and I hastened my departure, which was fixed for the following day—when in the evening my master came into the store with a paper in his hand.

"Charis," said he, "perhaps you have supposed that I only offered to make you a partner in my business to induce you to remain, and then to deceive you. To prove the contrary, here is a deed drawn up by which you are a partner, and entitled to one third of the future profits. Look at it, you will find that it has been executed in due form before the cadi."

He had put the paper into my hand, and I was about to return

it with a refusal, when a loud knocking at the door startled us both. It was a party of janissaries despatched by the aga, to bring us to him immediately. I knew well enough what it must be about, and I cursed my folly in having delayed so long; but the fact was, the wine proved so agreeable to the aga's palate that he had drunk it much faster than usual; besides which, the body of the slave took up at least a third of the cask, and diminished the contents in the same proportion. There was no appeal, and no escape. My master, who was ignorant of the cause, did not seem at all alarmed, but willingly accompanied the soldiers. I, on the contrary, was nearly dead from fear.

When we arrived, the aga burst out in the most violent exclamations against my master. "Thou rascal of a Jew!" said he, "dost thou think that thou art to impose upon a true believer, and sell him a pipe of wine which is not more than two thirds full,—filling it up with trash of some sort or another. Tell me what it is that is so heavy in the cask now that it is empty?"

The Jew protested his ignorance, and appealed to me. I, of course, pretended the same. "Well then," replied the aga, "we will soon see. Let thy Greek send for his tools, and the cask shall be opened in our presence; then perhaps, thou wilt recognise thine own knavery."

Two of the janissaries were despatched for the tools, and when they arrived, I was directed to take the head out of the cask. I now considered my death as certain—nothing buoyed me up but my observing that the resentment of the aga was levelled more against my master than against me; but still I thought that, when the cask was opened, the recognition of the black slave must immediately take place, and the evidence of my master would fix the murder upon me.

It was with a trembling hand that I obeyed the orders of the aga—the head of the pipe was taken out, and, to the horror of all present, the body was exposed; but instead of being black, it had turned *white,* from the time which it had been immersed. I rallied a little at this circumstance, as, so far, suspicion would be removed.

"Holy Abraham!" exclaimed my master, "what is that which I see! A dead body, so help me God!—but I know nothing about it—do you, Charis?" I vowed that I did not, and called the patriarch to witness the truth of my assertion. But while we were thus exclaiming, the aga's eyes were fixed upon my master with an indignant and deadly stare which spoke volumes; while the re-

mainder of the people who were present, although they said nothing, seemed as if they were ready to tear him into pieces.

"Cursed unbeliever!" as last uttered the Turk, "is it thus that thou preparest the wine for the disciples of the Prophet?"

"Holy father Abraham!—I know no more than you do, aga, how that body came there; but I will change the cask with pleasure, and will send you another."

"Be it so," replied the aga; "my slave shall fetch it now." He gave directions accordingly, and the litter soon re-appeared with another pipe of wine.

"It will be a heavy loss to a poor Jew—one pipe of good wine," observed my master, as it was rolled out of the litter; and he took up his hat with the intention to depart.

"Stay," cried the aga, "I do not mean to rob you of your wine."

"Oh, then, you will pay me for it," replied my master; "aga, you are a considerate man."

"Thou shalt see," retorted the aga, who gave directions to his slaves to draw off the wine in vessels. As soon as the pipe was empty he desired me to take the head out; and when I had obeyed him, he ordered his janissaries to put my master in. In a minute he was gagged and bound, and tossed into the pipe; and I was directed to put in the head as before. I was very unwilling to comply: for I had no reason to complain of my master, and knew that he was punished for the fault of which I had been guilty. But it was a case of life or death—and the days of self-devotion have long passed away in our country. Besides which, I had the deed in my pocket by which I was a partner in the business, and my master had no heirs—so that I stood a chance to come in for the whole of his property. Moreover——

"Never mind your reasons," observed the pacha, "you headed him up in the cask—Go on."

"I did so, your highness; but although I dared not disobey, I assure you that it was with a sorrowful heart—the more so, as I did not know the fate which might be reserved for myself."

As soon as the head was in, and the hoops driven on, the aga desired his slaves to fill the cask up again with the wine; and thus did my poor master perish.

"Put in the bung, Greek," said the aga, in a stern voice.

I did so, and stood trembling before him.

"Well! what knowest thou of this transaction?"

I thought, as the aga had taken away the life of my master, that it would not hurt him if I took away a little from his character. I answered that I really knew nothing, but that, the other day, a black slave had disappeared in a very suspicious manner—that my master made very little inquiry after him—and I now strongly suspected that he must have suffered the same fate. I added, that my master had expressed himself very sorry that his highness had taken away the pipe of wine, as he would have reserved it.

"Cursed Jew!" replied the aga; "I don't doubt but he has murdered a dozen in the same manner."

"I am afraid so, sir," replied I, "and suspect that I was to have been his next victim; for when I talked of going away, he persuaded me to stay, and gave me this paper, by which I was to become his partner with one third of the profits. I presume that I should not have enjoyed them long."

"Well, Greek," observed the aga, "this is fortunate for you; as, upon certain conditions, you may enter upon the whole property. One is, that you keep this pipe of wine with the rascally Jew in it, that I may have the pleasure occasionally to look at my revenge. You will also keep the pipe with the other body in it, that it may keep my anger alive. The last is you will supply me with what wine I may require, of the very best quality, without making any charge. Do you consent to these terms, or am I to consider you as a party to this infamous transaction?"

I hardly need observe that the terms were gladly accepted. Your highness must be aware that nobody thinks much about a Jew. When I was questioned as to his disappearance, I shrugged up my shoulders, and told the inquirers, confidentially, that the aga of the janissaries had put him *in prison,* and that I was carrying on the business until his release.

In compliance with the wishes of the aga, the two casks containing the Jew and the Ethiopian slave, were placed together on settles higher than the rest, in the centre of the store. He would come in the evening, and rail at the cask containing my late master for hours at a time; during which he drank so much wine, that it was a very common circumstance for him to remain in the house until the next morning.

You must not suppose, your highness, that I neglected to avail myself (unknown to the aga) of the peculiar properties of the wine which those casks contained. I had them spiled underneath, and constantly running off the wine from them, filled them up afresh. In a short time there was not a gallon in my possession

which had not a *dash* in it of either the Ethiopian or the Jew: and my wine was so improved, that it had a most rapid sale, and I became rich.

All went on prosperously for three years; when the aga, who during that time had been my constant guest, and at least three times a week had been intoxicated in my house, was ordered with his troops to join the sultan's army. By keeping company with him, I had insensibly imbibed a taste for wine, although I never had been inebriated. The day that his troops marched, he stopped at my door, and dismounting from his Arabian, came in to take a farewell glass, desiring his men to go on, and that he would ride after them. One glass brought on another, and the time flew rapidly away. The evening closed in, and the aga was, as usual, in a state of intoxication:—he insisted upon going down to the store, to rail once more at the cask containing the body of the Jew. We had long been on the most friendly terms, and having this night drunk more than usual, I was incautious enough to say—"Prithee, aga, do not abuse my poor master any more, for he has been the making of my fortune. I will tell you a secret now that you are going away—there is not a drop of wine in my store that has not been flavoured either by him or by the slave in the other cask. That is the reason why it is so much better than other people's."

"How!" exclaimed the aga, who was now almost incapable of speech. "Very well, rascal Greek! die you shall, like your master. Holy Prophet! what a state for a Mussulman to go to Paradise in —impregnated with the essence of a cursed Jew! Wretch! you shall die—you shall die."

He made a grasp at me, and missing his foot, fell on the ground in such a state of drunkenness as not to be able to get up again. I knew that when he became sober, he would not forget what had taken place, and that I should be sacrificed to his vengeance. The fear of death, and the wine which I had drunk, decided me how to act. I dragged him into an empty pipe, put the head in, hooped it up, and rolling it into the tier, filled it with wine. Thus did I revenge my poor master, and relieved myself from any further molestation on the part of the aga.

"What!" cried the pacha, in a rage, "you drowned a true believer—an aga of janissaries! Thou dog of a kafir—thou son of Shitan—and dare avow it! Call in the executioner."

"Mercy! your sublime highness, mercy!" cried the Greek. "Have I not your promise by the sword of the Prophet? Besides,

he was no true believer, or he would not have disobeyed the law. A good Mussulman will never touch a drop of wine."

"I promised to forgive, and did forgive, the murder of the black slave; but an aga of janissaries! Is not that quite another thing?" appealed the pacha to Mustapha.

"Your highness is just in your indignation—the kafir deserves to be impaled. Yet there are two considerations which your slave ventures to submit to your sublime wisdom. The first is, that your highness gave an unconditional promise, and swore by the sword of the Prophet."

"Staffir Allah! what care I for that! Had I sworn to a true believer, it were something."

"The other is, that the slave has not yet finished his story which appears to be interesting."

"Wallah! that is true. Let him finish his story."

But the Greek slave remained with his face on the ground; and it was not until a renewal of the promise, sworn upon the holy standard made out of the nether garments of the Prophet, by the pacha who had recovered his temper, and was anxious for the conclusion of the story, that he could be induced to proceed, which he did as follows:

As soon as I had bunged up the cask, I went down to the yard where the aga had left his horse, and having severely wounded the poor beast with his sword, I let it loose that it might gallop home. The noise of the horse's hoofs in the middle of the night, aroused his family, and when they discovered that it was wounded and without its rider, they imagined that the aga had been attacked and murdered by banditti when he had followed his troop. They sent to me to ask at what time he had left my house; I replied, an hour after dark—that he was very much intoxicated a the time—and had left his sabre, which I returned. They had no suspicion of the real facts, and it was believed that he had perished on the road.

I was now rid of my dangerous acquaintance; and although he certainly had drunk a great quantity of my wine yet I recovered the value of it with interest, from the flavour which I obtained from his body and which I imparted to the rest of my stock. I raised him up alongside of the two other casks; and my trade was more profitable and my wines in greater repute than ever.

But one day the cadi, who had heard my wine extolled, came privately to my house; I bowed to the ground at the honour con-

ferred, for I had long wished to have him as a customer. I drew some of my best: "Thus, honourable sir," said I, presenting the glass, "is what I call my aga wine: the late aga was so fond of it, he used to order a whole cask at once to his house, and had it taken there in a litter."

"A good plan," replied the cadi, "much better than sending a slave with a pitcher, which gives occasion for remarks: I will do the same; but, first, let me taste all you have."

He tasted several casks, but none pleased him so much as the first which I had recommended. At last he cast his eyes upon the three casks raised above the others.

"And what are those?" enquired he.

"Empty casks, sir," replied I; but he had his stick in his hand, and he struck one.

"Greek thou tellest me these casks are empty, but they do not sound so; I suspect that thou hast better wine than I have tasted: draw me off from these immediately."

I was obliged to comply—he tasted them—vowed that the wine was exquiste, and that he would purchase the whole. I stated to him that the wine in those casks was used for flavouring the rest; and that the price was enormous, hoping that he would not pay it. He enquired how much: I asked him four times the price of the other wines.

"Agreed," said the cadi; "it is dear—but one cannot have good wine without paying for it—it is a bargain."

I was very much alarmed; and stated that I could not part with those casks, as I should not be able to carry on my business with reputation, if I lost the means of flavouring my wines, but all in vain; he said that I had asked a price and he had agreed to give it. Ordering his slaves to bring a litter, he would not leave the store until the whole of the casks were carried away, and thus did I lose my Ethiopian, my Jew, and my aga.

As I knew that the secret would soon be discovered, the very next day I prepared for my departure. I received my money from the cadi, to whom I stated my intention to leave, as he had obliged me to sell him those wines, and I had no longer hopes of carrying on my business with success. I again begged him to allow me to have them back, offering him three pipes of wine as a present if he would consent, but it was of no use. I chartered a vessel, which I loaded with the rest of my stock; and, taking all my money with me, made sail for Corfu, before any discovery had taken place. But we encountered a heavy gale of wind, which,

after a fortnight (during which we attempted in vain to make head against it), forced us back to Smyrna. When the weather moderated, I directed the captain to take the vessel into the outer roadstead that I might sail as soon as possible. We had not dropped anchor again more than five minutes when I perceived a boat pulling off from the shore in which was the cadi and the officers of justice.

Convinced that I was discovered, I was at a loss how to proceed, when the idea occurred to me that I might conceal my own body in a cask, as I had before so well concealed those of others.

I called the captain down into the cabin, and telling him that I had reason to suspect that the cadi would take my life, offered him a large part of the cargo if he would assist me.

The captain who, unfortunately for me, was a Greek, consented. We went down into the hold, started the wine out of one of the pipes, and having taken out the head, I crawled in, and was hooped up.

The cadi came on board immediately afterwards and enquired for me. The captain stated that I had fallen overboard in the gale, and that he had in consequence returned, the vessel not being consigned to any house at Corfu.

"Has then the accursed villain escaped my vengeance!" exclaimed the cadi; "the murderer, that fines his wines with the bodies of his fellow-creatures: but you may deceive me, Greek, we will examine the vessel."

The officers who accompanied the cadi proceeded carefully to search every part of the ship. Not being able to discover me, the Greek captain was believed; and, after a thousand imprecations upon my soul, the cadi and his people departed.

I now breathed more freely, nothwithstanding I was nearly intoxicated with the lees of the wine which impregnated the wood of the cask, and I was anxious to be set at liberty; but the treacherous captain had no such intention, and never came near me. At night he cut his cable and made sail, and I overheard a conversation between two of the men, which made known to me his intentions: these were to throw me overboard on his passage, and take possession of my property. I cried out to them from the bunghole: I screamed for mercy, but in vain. One of them answered that, as I had murdered others, and put them into casks, I should now be treated in the same manner.

I could not but mentally acknowledge the justice of my punishment, and resigned myself to my fate; all that I wished was to be

thrown over at once and released from my misery. The momentary anticipation of death appeared to be so much worse than the reality. But it was ordered otherwise: a gale of wind blew up with such force that the captain and crew had enough to do to look after the vessel, and either I was forgotten, or my doom was postponed until a more seasonable opportunity.

On the third day I heard the sailors observe that, with such a wretch as I was remaining on board, the vessel must inevitably be lost. The hatches were then opened; I was hoisted up and cast into the raging sea. The bung of the cask was out, but by stuffing my handkerchief in, when the hole was under water, I prevented the cask from filling; and when it was uppermost, I removed it for a moment to obtain fresh air. I was dreadfully bruised by the constant rolling, in a heavy sea, and completely worn out with fatigue and pain; I had made up my mind to let the water in and be rid of my life, when I was tossed over and over with such dreadful rapidity as prevented my taking the precaution of keeping out the water. After three successive rolls of the same kind, I found that the cask, which had been in the surf, had struck on the beach. In a moment after, I heard voices, and people came up to the cask and rolled me along. I would not speak, lest they should be frightened and allow me to remain on the beach, where I might again be tossed about by the waves; but as soon as they stopped, I called in a faint voice from the bunghole begging them for mercy's sake to let me out.

At first they appeared alarmed; but, on my repeating my request, and stating that I was the owner of the ship which was off the land, and the captain and crew had mutinied and tossed me overboard, they brought some tools and set me at liberty.

The first sight that met my eyes after I was released, was my vessel lying a wreck; each wave that hurled her further on the beach, breaking her more and more to pieces. She was already divided amidships, and the white foaming surf was covered with pipes of wine, which, as fast as they were cast on shore, were rolled up by the same people who had released me. I was so worn out, that I fainted where I lay. When I came to, I found myself in a cave upon a bundle of capotes, and perceived a party of forty or fifty men, who were sitting by a large fire, and emptying with great rapidity one of my pipes of wine.

As soon as they observed that I was coming to my senses, they poured some wine down my throat, which restored me. I was

then desired by one of them, who seemed to be the chief, to approach.

"The men who have been saved from the wreck," said he, "have told me strange stories of your enormous crimes—now, sit down, and tell me the truth—if I believe you, you shall have justice—I am cadi here—if you wish to know where you are, it is upon the island of Ischia—if you wish to know in what company, it is in the society of those who by illiberal people are called pirates: now tell the truth."

I thought that with pirates my story would be received better than with other people, and I therefore narrated my history to them, in the same words that I now have to your highness. When I had finished, the captain of the gang observed:

"Well, then, as you acknowledge to have killed a slave, to have assisted at the death of a Jew, and to have drowned an aga, you certainly deserve death; but, on consideration of the excellence of the wine, and the secret which you have imparted to us, I shall commute your sentence. As for the captain and the remainder of the crew, they have been guilty of treachery and piracy on the high seas—a most heinous offence, which deserves instant death: but as it is by their means that we have been put in possession of the wine, I shall be lenient. I therefore sentence you all to hard labour for life. You shall be sold as slaves in Cairo, and we will pocket the money and drink your wine."

The pirates loudly applauded the justice of a decision by which they benefited, and all appeal on our parts was useless. When the weather became more settled, we were put on board one of their small xebeques, and on our arrival at this port were exposed for sale and purchased.

Such, pacha, is the history which induced me to make use of the expressions which you wished to be explained; and I hope you will allow that I have been more unfortunate than guilty, as on every occasion in which I took away the life of another, I had only to choose between that and my own.

John Masefield

ANTY BLIGH

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One night in the tropics I was "farmer" in the middle watch —that is, I had neither "wheel" nor "look-out" to stand during the four hours I stayed on deck. We were running down the North-east Trades, and the ship was sailing herself, and the wind was gentle, and it was very still on board, the blocks whining as she rolled, and the waves talking, and the wheel-chains clanking, and a light noise aloft of pattering and tapping. The sea was all pale with moonlight, and from the lamp-room door, where the watch was mustered, I could see a red stain on the water from the port sidelight. The mate was walking the weather side of the poop, while the boastwain sat on the booby-hatch humming an old tune and making a sheath for his knife. The watch were lying on the deck, out of the moonlight, in the shadow of the break of the poop. Most of them were sleeping, propped against the bulkhead. One of them was singing a new chanty he had made, beating out the tune with his pipe-stem, in a little quiet voice that fitted the silence of the night.

Ha! Ha! Why don't you blow?
O ho!
Come, roll him over,

repeated over and over again, as though he could never tire of the beauty of the words and the tune.

Presently he got up from where he was and came over to me. He was one of the best men we had aboard—a young Dane who talked English like a native. We had had business dealings during the dog watch, some hours before, and he had bought a towel from me, and I had let him have it cheap, as I had one or two to spare. He sat down beside me, and began a conversation, discussing a number of sailor matters, such as the danger of sleeping in the moonlight, the poison supposed to lurk in cold boiled potatoes, and the folly of having a good time in port. From these we passed to the consideration of piracy, colouring our talk with anecdotes of pirates. "Ah, there was no pirate," said my friend, "like old Anty Bligh of Bristol. Dey hung old Anty Bligh off of the Brazils. He was the core and the strands of an old rogue, old

Anty Bligh was. Dey hung old Anty Bligh on Fernando Noronha, where the prison is. And he walked after, Anty Bligh did. That shows how bad he was." "How did he walk?" I asked. "Let's hear about him." "Oh, they jest hung him," replied my friend, "like they'd hang any one else, and they left him on the gallows after. Dey thought old Anty was too bad to bury, I guess. And there was a young Spanish captain on the island in dem times. Frisco Baldo his name was. He was a terror. So the night dey hung old Anty, Frisco was getting gorgeous wid some other captains in a kind of a drinking shanty. And de other captains say to Frisco, 'I bet you a month's pay you won't go and put a rope round Anty's legs.' And 'I bet you a new suit of clothes you won't put a bowline around Anty's ankles.' And 'I bet you a cask of wine you won't put Anty's feet in a noose.' 'I bet you I will,' says Frisco Baldo. 'What's dead man anyways,' he says, 'and why should I be feared of Anty Bligh? Give us a rope,' he says, 'and I'll lash him up with seven turns, like a sailor would a hammock.' So he drinks up his glass, and gets a stretch of rope, and out he goes into the dark to where the gallows stood. It was a new moon dat time, and it was as dark as the end of a sea-boot and as blind as the toe. And the gallows was right down by the sea dat time because old Anty Bligh was a pirate. So he comes up under the gallows, and there was old Anty Bligh hanging. And 'Way-ho, Anty,' he says. 'Lash and carry, Anty,' he says. 'I'm going to lash you up like a hammock.' So he slips a bowline around Anty's feet." . . . Here my informant broke off his yarn to light his pipe. After a few puffs he went on.

"Now when a man's hanged in hemp," he said gravely, "you mustn't never touch him with what killed him, for fear he should come to life on you. You mark that. Don't you forget it. So soon as ever Frisco Baldo sets that bowline around Anty's feet, old Anty looks down from his noose, and though it was dark, Frisco Baldo could see him plain enough. 'Thank you, young man,' said Anty; 'just cast that turn off again. Burn my limbs,' he says, 'if you ain't got a neck! And now climb up here,' he says, 'and take my neck out of the noose. I'm as dry as a cask of split peas.' Now you may guess that Frisco Baldo feller he come out all over in a cold sweat. 'Git a gait on you,' says Anty. 'I ain't going to wait up here to please you.' So Frisco Baldo climbs up, and a sore job he had of it getting the noose off Anty. 'Get a gait on you,' says Anty, 'and go easy with them clumsy hands of yours. You'll give me a sore throat,' he says, 'the way you're carrying on. Now

don't let me fall plop,' says Anty. 'Lower away handsomely,' he says. 'I'll make you a weary one if you let me fall plop,' he says. So Frisco lowers away handsomely, and Anty comes to the ground, with the rope off him, only he still had his head to one side like he'd been hanged. 'Come here to me,' he says. So Frisco Baldo goes over to him. And Anty he jest put one arm round his neck, and gripped him tight and cold. 'Now march,' he says; 'march me down to the grog shop and get me a dram. None of your six-water dollops, neither,' he says; 'I'm as dry as a foul block,' he says. So Frisco and Anty they go to the grog shop, and all the while Anty's cold fingers was playing down Frisco's neck. And when they got to der grog shop der captains was all fell asleep. So Frisco takes the bottle of rum and Anty laps it down like he'd been used to it. 'Ah!' he says, 'thank ye,' he says, 'and now down to the Mole with ye,' he says, 'and we'll take a boat,' he says; 'I'm going to England,' he says, 'to say good-bye to me mother.' So Frisco he come out all over in a cold sweat, for he was feared of the sea; but Anty's cold fingers was fiddling on his neck, so he t'ink he better go. And when dey come to der Mole there was a boat there—one of these perry-acks, as they call them—and Anty he says, 'You take the oars,' he says. 'I'll steer,' he says, 'and every time you catch a crab,' he says, 'you'll get such a welt as you'll remember.' So Frisco shoves her off and rows out of the harbour, with old Anty Bligh at the tiller, telling him to put his beef on and to watch out he didn't catch no crabs. And he rowed, and he rowed, and he rowed, and every time he caught a crab—whack! he had it over the sconce with the tiller. And der perry-ack it went a great holy big skyoot, ninety knots in der quarter of an hour, so they soon sees the Bull Point Light and der Shutter Light, and then the lights of Bristol. 'Oars,' said Anty. 'Lie on yours oars,' he says; 'we got way enough.' Then dey make her fast to a dock-side and dey goes ashore, and Anty has his arm round Frisco's neck, and 'March,' he says; 'step lively,' he says; 'for Johnny comes marching home,' he says. By and by they come to a little house with a light in the window. 'Knock at the door,' says Anty. So Frisco knocks, and in they go. There was a fire burning in the room and some candles on the table, and there, by the fire, was a very old, ugly woman in a red flannel dress, and she'd a ring in her nose and a black cutty pipe between her lips. 'Good evening, mother,' says Anty. 'I come home,' he says. But the old woman she just looks at him but never says nothing. 'It's your son Anty that's come home to you,' he says again. So she looks at

him again and, 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Anty,' she says, 'coming home the way you are? Don't you repent your goings-on?' she says. 'Dying disgraced,' she says, 'in a foreign land, with none to lay you out.' 'Mother,' he says, 'I repent in blood,' he says. 'You'll not deny me my rights?' he says. 'Not since you repent,' she says. 'Them as repents I got no quarrel with. You was always a bad one, Anty,' she says, 'but I hoped you'd come home in the end. Well, and now you're come,' she says. 'And I must bathe that throat of yours,' she says. 'It looks as though you been hit by something.' 'Be quick, mother,' he says; 'it's after midnight now,' he says.

"So she washed him in wine, the way you wash a corpse, and put him in a white linen shroud, with a wooden cross on his chest, and two silver pieces on his eyes, and a golden marigold between his lips. And together they carried him to the perry-ack and laid him in the stern sheets. 'Give way, young man,' she says; 'give way like glory. Pull, my heart of blood,' she says, 'or we'll have the dawn on us.' So he pulls, that Frisco Baldo does, and the perry-ack makes big southing—a degree a minute—and they comes ashore at the Mole just as the hens was settling to their second sleep. 'To the churchyard,' says the old woman; 'you take his legs.' So they carries him to the churchyard at the double. 'Get a gait on you,' says Anty. 'I feel the dawn in my bones,' he says. 'My wraith'll chase you if you ain't in time,' he says. And there was an empty grave, and they put him in, and shovelled in the clay, and the old woman poured out a bottle on the top of it. 'It's holy water,' she says. 'It's make his wraith rest easy.' Then she runs down to the sea's edge and gets into the perry-ack. And immediately she was hull down beyond the horizon, and the sun came up out of the sea, and the cocks cried cock-a-doodle in the hen roost, and Frisco Baldo falls down into a swound. He was a changed man from that out."

"Lee for brace," said the mate above us. "Quit your chinning there, and go forward to the rope."

Herman Melville

THE BELL-TOWER

In the south of Europe, nigh a once frescoed capital, now with dank mould, cankering its bloom, central in a plain, stands what, at distance, seems the black mossed stump of some immeasurable pine, fallen in forgotten days, with Anak and the Titan.

As all along where the pine-tree falls, its dissolution leaves a mossy mound—last-flung shadow of the perished trunk; never lengthening, never lessening; unsubject to the fleet falsities of the sun; shade immutable, and true gauge which cometh by prostration—so westward from what seems the stump, one steadfast spear of lichened ruin veins the plain.

From that tree-top, what birded chimes of silver throats had rung. A stone pine, a metallic aviary in its crown: The Bell-Tower, built by the great mechanician, the unblest foundling, Bannadonna.

Like Babel's, its base was laid in a high hour of renovated earth, following the second deluge, when the waters of the Dark Ages had dried up, and once more the green appeared. No wonder that, after so long and deep submersion, the jubilant expectation of the race should, as with Noah's sons, soar into Shinar aspiration.

In firm resolve, no man in Europe at that period went beyond Bannadonna. Enriched through commerce with the Levant, the state in which he lived voted to have the noblest Bell-Tower in Italy. His repute assigned him to be architect.

Stone by stone, month by month, the tower rose. Higher, higher; snail-like in pace, but torch or rocket in its pride.

After the masons would depart, the builder, standing alone upon its ever-ascending summit, at close of every day, saw that he overtopped still higher walls and trees. He would tarry till a late hour there, wrapped in schemes of other and still loftier piles. Those who of saints' days thronged the spot—hanging to the rude poles of scaffolding, like sailors on yards, or bees on boughs, unmindful of lime and dust, and falling chips of stone—their homage not the less inspirited him to self-esteem.

At length the holiday of the Tower came. To the sound of viols, the climax-stone slowly rose in air, and, amid the firing of ordnance, was laid by Bannadonna's hands upon the final course. Then mounting it, he stood erect, alone, with folded arms, gazing upon the white summits of blue inland Alps, and whiter crests of

bluer Alps off-shore—sights invisible from the plain. Invisible, too, from thence was that eye he turned below, when, like the cannon booms, came up to him the people's combustions of applause.

That which stirred them so was, seeing with what serenity the builder stood three hundred feet in air, upon an unrailed perch. This none but he durst do. But his periodic standing upon the pile, in each stage of its growth—such discipline had its last result.

Little remained now but the bells. These, in all respects, must correspond with their receptacle.

The minor ones were prosperously cast. A highly enriched one followed, of a singular make, intended for suspension in a manner before unknown. The purpose of this bell, its rotary motion, and connection with the clock-work, also executed at the time, will, in the sequel, receive mention.

In the one erection, bell-tower and clock-tower were united; though, before that period, such structures had commonly been built distinct; as the Campanile and Torre del 'Orologio of St. Mark to this day attest.

But it was upon the great state-bell that the founder lavished his more daring skill. In vain did some of the less elated magistrates here caution him; saying that though truly the tower was Titanic, yet limit should be set to the dependent weight of its swaying masses. But undeterred, he prepared his mammoth mould, dented with mythological devices; kindled his fires of balsamic firs; melted his tin and copper, and, throwing in much plate, contributed by the public spirit of the nobles, let loose the tide.

The unleashed metals bayed like hounds. The workmen shrunk. Through their fright, fatal harm to the bell was dreaded. Fearless as Shadrach, Bannadonna, rushing through the glow, smote the chief culprit with his ponderous ladle. From the smitten part, a splinter was dashed into the seething mass, and at once was melted in.

Next day a portion of the work was heedfully uncovered. All seemed right. Upon the third morning, with equal satisfaction, it was bared still lower. At length, like some old Theban king, the whole cooled casting was distinterred. All was fair except in one strange spot. But as he suffered no one to attend him in these inspections, he concealed the blemish by some preparation which none knew better to devise.

The casting of such a mass was deemed no small triumph for the caster; one, too, in which the state might not scorn to share. The homicide was overlooked. By the charitable that deed was but imputed to sudden transports of aesthetic passion, not to any flagitious quality. A kick from an Arabian charger; not sign of vice, but blood.

His felony remitted by the judge, absolution given him by the priest, what more could even a sickly conscience have desired.

Honouring the tower and its builder with another holiday, the republic witnessed the hoisting of the bells and clock-work amid shows and pomps superior to the former.

Some months of more than usual solitude on Bannadonna's part ensued. It was not unknown that he was engaged upon something for the belfry, intended to complete it, and surpass all that had gone before. Most people imagined that the design would involve a casting like the bells. But those who thought they had some further insight, would shake their heads, with hints, that not for nothing did the mechanician keep so secret. Meantime, his seclusion failed not to invest his work with more or less of that sort of mystery pertaining to the forbidden.

Ere long he had a heavy object hoisted to the belfry, wrapped in a dark sack or cloak—a procedure sometimes had in the case of an elaborate piece of sculpture, or statue, which, being intended to grace the front of a new edifice, the architect does not desire exposed to critical eyes, till set up, finished, in its appointed place. Such was the impression now. But, as the object rose, a statuary present observed, or thought he did, that it was not entirely rigid, but was, in a manner, pliant. At last, when the hidden thing had attained its final height, and, obscurely seen from below, seemed almost of itself to step into the belfry, as if with little assistance from the crane, a shrewd old blacksmith present ventured the suspicion that it was but a living man. This surmise was thought a foolish one, while the general interest failed not to augment.

Not without demur from Bannadonna, the chief magistrate of the town, with an associate—both elderly men—followed what seemed the image up the tower. But, arrived at the belfry, they had little recompense. Plausibly entrenching himself behind the conceded mysteries of his art, the mechanician withheld present explanation. The magistrates glanced toward the cloaked object, which, to their surprise, seemed now to have changed its attitude,

or else had before been more perplexingly concealed by the violent muffling action of the wind without. It seemed now seated upon some sort of frame, or chair, contained within the domino. They observed that nigh the top, in a sort of square, the web of the cloth, either from accident or design, had its warp partly withdrawn, and the cross threads plucked out here and there, so as to form a sort of woven grating. Whether it were the low wind or no, stealing through the stone lattice-work, or only their own perturbed imaginations, is uncertain, but they thought they discerned a slight sort of fitful, spring-like motion, in the domino. Nothing, however incidental or insignificant, escaped their uneasy eyes. Among other things, they pried out, in a corner, an earthen cup, partly corroded and partly encrusted, and one whispered to the other, that this cup was just such a one as might, in mockery, be offered to the lips of some brazen statue, or, perhaps, still worse.

But, being questioned, the mechanician said, that the cup was simply used in his founder's business, and described the purpose; in short, a cup to test the condition of metals in fusion. He added, that it had got into the belfry by the merest chance.

Again, and again, they gazed at the domino, as at some suspicious incognito at a Venetian mask. All sorts of vague apprehensions stirred them. They even dreaded less, when they should descend, the mechanician, though without a flesh and blood companion, for all that, would not be left alone.

Affecting some merriment at their disquietude, he begged to relieve them, by extending a coarse sheet of workman's canvass between them and the object.

Meantime he sought to interest them in his other work; nor, now that the domino was out of sight, did they long remain insensible to the artistic wonders lying round them; wonders hitherto beheld but in their unfinished state; because, since hoisting the bells, none but the caster had entered within the belfry. It was one trait of his, that, even in details, he would not let another do what he could, without too great loss of time, accomplish for himself. So, for several preceding weeks, whatever hours were unemployed in his secret design, had been devoted to laborating the figures on the bells.

The clock-bell, in particular, now drew attention. Under a patient chisel, the latent beauty of its enrichments, before obscured by the cloudings incident to casting, that beauty in its shyest grace, was now revealed. Round and round the bell, twelve

figures of gay girls, garlanded, hand-in-hand, danced in a choral ring—the embodied hours.

"Bannadonna," said the chief, "this bell excels all else. No added touch could here improve. Hark!" hearing a sound, "was that the wind?"

"The wind, Excellenza," was the light response. "But the figures, they are not yet without their faults. They need some touches yet. When those are given, and the—block yonder," pointing toward the canvas screen, "when Haman there, as I merrily call him,—him? *it,* I mean—when Haman is fixed on this, his lofty tree, then, gentlemen, will I be most happy to receive you here again."

The equivocal reference to the object caused some return of restlessness. However, on their part, the visitors forebore further allusion to it, unwilling, perhaps, to let the foundling see how easily it lay within his plebeian art to stir the placid dignity of nobles.

"Well, Bannadonna," said the chief, "how long ere you are ready to set the clock going, so that the hour shall be sounded? Our interest in you, not less than in the work itself, makes us anxious to be assured of your success. The people, too,—why, they are shouting now. Say the exact hour when you will be ready."

"To-morrow, Excellenza, if you listen for it,—or should you not, all the same—strange music will be heard. The stroke of one shall be the first from yonder bell," pointing to the bell adorned with girls and garlands, "that stroke shall fall there, where the hand of Una clasps Dua's. The stroke of one shall sever that loved clasp. To-morrow, then, at one o'clock, as struck here, precisely here," advancing and placing his finger upon the clasp, "the poor mechanic will be most happy once more to give you liege audience, in this his littered shop. Farewell till then, illustrious magnificoes, and hark ye for your vassal's stroke."

His still, Vulcanic face hiding its burning brightness like a forge, he moved with ostentatious deference toward the scuttle, as if so far to escort their exit. But the junior magistrate, a kind-hearted man, troubled at what seemed to him a certain sardonical disdain, lurking beneath the foundling's humble mien, and in Christian sympathy more distressed at it on his account than on his own, dimly surmising what might be the final fate of such a cynic solitaire, nor perhaps uninfluenced by the general strangeness of surrounding things, this good magistrate had glanced

sadly, sideways from the speaker, and thereupon his foreboding eye had started at the expression of the unchanging face of the hour Una.

"How is this, Bannadonna?" he lowly asked, "Una looks unlike her sisters."

"In Christ's name, Bannadonna," impulsively broke in the chief, his attention, for the first attracted to the figure, by his associate's remark, "Una's face looks just like that of Deborah, the prophetess, as painted by the Florentine, Del Fonca."

"Surely, Bannadonna," lowly resumed the milder magistrate, "you meant the twelve should wear the same jocundly abandondoned air. But see, the smile of Una seems but a fatal one. 'Tis different."

While his mild associate was speaking, the chief glanced, inquiringly, from him to the caster, as if anxious to mark how the discrepancy would be accounted for. As the chief stood, his advanced foot was on the scuttle's curb.

Bannadonna spoke.

"Excellenza, now that, following your keener eye, I glance upon the face of Una, I do indeed perceive some little variance. But look all round the bell, and you will find no two faces entirely correspond. Because there is a law in art—but the cold wind is rising more; these lattices are but a poor defence. Suffer me, magnificoes, to conduct you, at least, partly on your way. Those in whose well-being there is a public stake, should be heedfully attended."

"Touching the look of Una, you were saying, Bannadonna, that there was a certain law in art," observed the chief, as the three now descended the stone shaft, "pray, tell me, then——"

"Pardon; another time, Excellenza;—the tower is damp."

"Nay, I must rest, and hear it now. Here,—here is a wide landing, and through this leeward slit, no wind, but ample light. Tell us of your law; and at large."

"Since, Excellenza, you insist, know that there is a law in art, which bars the possibility of duplicates. Some years ago, you may remember, I graved a small seal for your republic, bearing, for its chief device, the head of your own ancestor, its illustrious founder. It becoming necessary, for the customs' use, to have innumerable impressions for bales and boxes, I graved an entire plate, containing one hundred of the seals. Now, though, indeed, my object was to have those hundred heads identical, and though, I dare say, people think them so, yet, upon closely scanning an

uncut impression from the plate, no two of those five-score faces, side by side, will be found alike. Gravity is the air of all; but, diversified in all. In some, benevolent; in some, ambiguous; in two or three, to a close scrutiny, all but incipiently malign, the variation of less than a hair's-breadth in the linear shadings round the mouth sufficing to all this. Now, Excellenza, transmute that general gravity into joyousness, and subject it to twelve of those variations I have described, and tell me, will you not have my hours here, and Una one of them? But I like——"

"Hark! is that—a footfall above?"

"Mortar, Excellenza; sometimes it drops to the belfry floor from the arch where the stonework was left undressed. I must have it seen to. As I was about to say: for one, I like this law forbidding duplicates. It evokes fine personalities. Yes, Excellenza, that strange, and—to you—uncertain smile, and those fore-looking eyes of Una, suit Bannadonna very well."

"Hark!—sure we left no soul above?"

"No, soul, Excellenza; rest assured, no *soul.*—Again the mortar."

"It fell not while we were there."

"Ah, in your presence, it better knew its place, Excellenza," blandly bowed Bannadonna.

"But, Una," said the milder magistrate, "she seemed intently gazing on you; one would have almost sworn that she picked you out from among us three."

"If she did, possibly, it might have been her finer apprehension, Excellenza."

"How, Belladonna? I do not understand you."

"No consequence, no consequence, Excellenza—but the shifted wind is blowing through the slit. Suffer me to escort you on; and then, pardon, but the toiler must to his tools."

"It may be foolish, signor," said the milder magistrate, as, from the third landing, the two now went down unescorted, "but somehow, our great mechanician moves me strangely. Why, just now, when he so superciliously replied, his walk seemed Sisera's, God's vain foe, in Del Fonca's painting. And that young, sculptured Deborah, too. Ay, and that——"

"Tush, tush, signor!" returned the chief. "A passing whim. Deborah?—Where's Jael, pray?"

"Ah," said the other, as they now stepped upon the sod, "Ah, signor, I see you leave your fears behind you with the chill and gloom; but mine, even in this sunny air, remain. Hark!"

It was a sound from just within the tower door, whence they had emerged. Turning, they saw it closed.

"He has slipped down and barred us out," smiled the chief; "but it is his custom."

Proclamation was now made, that the next day, at one hour after meridian, the clock would strike, and—thanks to the mechanician's powerful art—with unusual accompaniments. But what those should be, none as yet could say. The announcement was received with cheers.

By the looser sort, who encamped about the tower all night, lights were seen gleaming through the topmost blind-work, only disappearing with the morning sun. Strange sounds, too, were heard, or were thought to be, by those whom anxious watching might not have left mentally undisturbed—sounds, not only of some ringing implement, but also—so they said—half-suppressed screams and plainings, such as might have issued from some ghostly engine, overplied.

Slowly the day drew on; part of the concourse chasing the weary time with songs and games, till, at last, the great blurred sun rolled, like a football, against the plain.

At noon, the nobility and principal citizens came from the town in cavalcade, a guard of soldiers, also, with music, the more to honour the occasion.

Only one hour more. Impatience grew. Watches were held in hands of feverish men, who stood, now scrutinising their small dial-plates, and then, with neck thrown back, gazing toward the belfry, as if the eye might foretell that which could only be made sensible to the ear; for, as yet, there was no dial to the tower-clock.

The hour hands of a thousand watches now verged within a hair's-breadth of the figure 1. A silence, as of the expectation of some Shiloh, pervaded the swarming plain. Suddenly a dull, mangled sound—naught ringing in it; scarcely audible, indeed, to the outer circles of the people—that dull sound dropped heavily from the belfry. At the same moment, each man stared at his neighbour blankly. All watches were upheld. All hour hands were at—had passed—the figure 1. No bell-stroke from the tower. The multiude became tumultuous.

Waiting a few moments, the chief magistrate, commanding silence, hailed the belfry, to know what thing unforeseen had happened there.

No response.

He hailed again and yet again.

All continued hushed.

By his order, the soldiers burst in the tower door; when, stationing guards to defend it from the now surging mob, the chief, accompanied by his former associate, climbing the winding stairs. Half-way up, they stopped to listen. No sound. Mounting faster, they reached the belfry; but, at the threshold, started at the spectacle disclosed. A spaniel, which, unbeknown to them, had followed them thus, far, stood shivering as before some unknown monster in a brake: or, rather, as if it snuffed footsteps leading to some other world.

Bannadonna lay, prostrate and bleeding, at the base of the bell which was adorned with girls and garlands. He lay at the feet of the hour Una; his head coinciding, in a vertical line, with her left hand, clasped by the hour Dua. With downcast face impending over him, like Jael over nailed Sisera in the tent, was the domino; now no more becloaked.

It had limbs, and seemed clad in a scaly mail, lustrous as a dragon-beetle's. It was manacled, and its clubbed arms were uplifted, as if, with its manacles, once more to smite its already smitten victim. One advanced foot of it was inserted beneath the dead body, as if in the act of spurning it.

Uncertainty falls on what now followed.

It were but natural to suppose that the magistrates would, at first, shrink from immediate personal contact with what they saw. At the least, for a time, they would stand in involuntary doubt; it may be, in more or less of horrified alarm. Certain it is, that an arquebus was called for from below. And some add, that its report, followed by a fierce whiz, as of the sudden snapping of a mainspring, with a steely din, as if a stack of sword-blades should be dashed upon a pavement, these blended sounds came ringing to the plain, attracting every eye far upward to the belfry, whence, through the lattice-work, thin wreaths of smoke were curling.

Some averred that it was the spaniel, gone mad by fear, which was shot. This, others, denied. True it was, the spaniel never more was seen; and, probably, for some unknown reason, it shared the burial now to be related of the domino. For, whatever the preceding circumstances may have been, the first instinctive panic over, or else all ground of reasonable fear removed, the two magistrates, by themselves, quickly rehooded the figure in the dropped cloak wherein it had been hoisted. The same night, it

was secretly lowered to the ground, smuggled to the beach, pulled far out to sea, and sunk. Nor to any after urgency, even in free convivial hours, would the twain ever disclose the full secrets of the belfry.

From the mystery unavoidably investing it, the popular solution of the foundling's fate involved more or less of supernatural agency. But some few less unscientific minds pretended to find little difficulty in otherwise accounting for it. In the chain of circumstantial inferences drawn, there may, or may not, have been some absent or defective links. But, as the explanation in question is the only one which tradition has explicitly preserved, in dearth of better, it will here be given. But, in the first place, it is requisite to present the supposition entertained as to the entire motive and mode, with their origin, of the secret design of Bannadonna; the minds above-mentioned assuming to penetrate as well into his soul as into the event. The disclosure will indirectly involve reference to peculiar matters, none of the clearest, beyond the immediate subject.

At that period, no large bell was made to sound otherwise than as at present, by agitation of a tongue within, by means of ropes, or percussion from without, either from cumbrous machinery, or stalwart watchmen, armed with heavy hammers, stationed in the belfry, or in sentry-boxes on the open roof, according as the bell was sheltered or exposed.

It was from observing these exposed bells, with their watchmen, that the foundling, as was opined, derived the first suggestion of his scheme. Perched on a great mast or spire, the human figure, viewed from below, undergoes such a reduction in its apparent size, as to obliterate its intelligent features. It evinces no personality. Instead of bespeaking volition, its gestures rather resemble the automatic ones of the arms of a telegraph.

Musing, therefore, upon the purely Punchinello aspect of the human figure thus beheld, it had indirectly occurred to Bannadonna to devise some metallic agent, which should strike the hour with its mechanic hand, with even greater precision than the vital one. And, moreover, as the vital watchman on the roof, sallying from his retreat at the given periods, walked to the bell with uplifted mace, to smite it. Bannadonna had resolved that his invention should likewise possess the power of locomotion, and, along with that, the appearance, at least, of intelligence and will.

If the conjectures of those who claimed acquaintance with the intent of Bannadonna be thus far correct, no unenterprising spirit

could have been his. But they stopped not here; intimating that though, ideed, his design had, in the first place, been prompted by the sight of the watchman, and confined to the devising of a subtle substitute for him: yet, as is not seldom the case with projectors, by insensible gradations, proceeding from comparatively pigmy aims to Titanic ones, the original scheme had, in its anticipated eventualities, at last, attained to an unheard-of degree of daring. He still bent his efforts upon the locomotive figure for the belfry, but only as a partial type of an ulterior creature, a sort of elephantine Helot, adapted to further, in a degree scarcely to be imagined, the universal conveniences and glories of humanity; supplying nothing less than a supplement to the Six Days' Work; stocking the earth with a new serf, more useful than the ox, swifter than the dolphin, stronger than the lion, more cunning than the ape, for industry an ant, more fiery than serpents, and yet, in patience, another ass. All excellences of all God-made creatures, which served man, were here to receive advancement, and then to be combined in one. Talus was to have been the all-accomplished Helot's name. Talus, iron slave to Bannadonna, and, through him, to man.

Here, it might well be thought that, were these last conjectures as to the foundling's secrets not erroneous, then must he have been hopelessly infected with the craziest chimeras of his age; far outgoing Albert Magus and Cornelius Agrippa. But the contrary was averred. However marvellous his design, however apparently transcending not alone the bounds of human invention, but those of divine creation, yet the proposed means to be employed were alleged to have been confined within the sober forms of sober reason. It was affirmed that, to a degree of more than sceptic scorn, Bannadonna had been without sympathy for any of the vain-glorious irrationalities of his time. For example, he had not concluded, with the visionaries among the metaphysicians, that between the finer mechanic forces and the ruder animal vitality some germ of correspondence might prove discoverable. As little did his scheme partake of the enthusiasm of some natural philosophers, who hoped, by physiological and chemical inductions, to arrive at a knowledge of the source of life, and so qualify themselves to manufacture and improve upon it. Much less had he aught in common with the tribe of alchemists, who sought, by a species of incantations, to evoke some surprising vitality from the laboratory. Neither had he imagined, with certain sanguine theosophists, that, by faithful adoration of

the Highest, unheard-of powers would be vouchsafed to man. A practical materialist, what Bannadonna had aimed at was to have been reached, not by logic, not by crucible, not by conjuration, not by altars; but by plain vice-bench and hammer. In short, to solve nature, to steal into her, to intrigue beyond her, to procure someone else to bind her to his hand;—these, one and all, had not been his objects; but, asking no favours from any element or any being, of himself, to rival her, outstrip her, and rule her. He stooped to conquer. With him, common-sense was theurgy; machinery, miracle; Prometheus, the heroic name for machinist; man, the true God.

Nevertheless, in his initial step, so far as the experimental automaton for the belfry was concerned, he allowed fancy some little play; or, perhaps, what seemed his fancifulness was but his utilitarian ambition collaterally extended. In figure, the creature for the belfry should not be likened after the human pattern, nor any animal one, nor after the ideals, however wild, of ancient fable, but equally in aspect as in organism be an original production; the more terrible to behold, the better.

Such, then, were the suppositions as to the present scheme, and the reserved intent. How, at the very threshold, so unlooked for a catastrophe overturned all, or rather, what was the conjecture here, is now to be set forth.

It was thought that on the day preceding the fatality, his visitors having left him, Bannadonna had unpacked the belfry image, adjusted it, and placed it in the retreat provided—a sort of sentry-box in one corner of the belfry; in short, throughout the night, and for some part of the ensuing morning, he had been engaged in arranging everything connected with the domino; the issuing from the sentry-box each sixty minutes; sliding along a grooved way, like a railway; advancing to the clock-bell, with uplifted manacles; striking it at one of the twelve junctions of the four-and-twenty hands; then wheeling, circling the bell, and retiring to its post, there to bide for another sixty minutes, when the same process was to be repeated; the bell, by a cunning mechanism, meantime turning on its vertical axis, so as to present, to the descending mace, the clasped hands of the next two figures, when it would strike two, three, and so on, to the end. The musical metal in this time-bell being so managed in the fusion, by some art, perishing with its originator, that each of the clasps of the four-and-twenty hands should give forth its own peculiar resonance when parted.

But on the magic metal, the magic and metallic stranger never struck but that one stroke, drove but that one nail, served but that one clasp, by which Bannadonna clung to his ambitious life. For, after winding up the creature in the sentry-box, so that, for the present, skipping the intervening hours, it should not emerge till the hour of one, but should then infallibly emerge, and, after deftly oiling the grooves whereon it was to slide, it was surmised that the mechanician must then have hurried to the bell, to give his final touches to its sculpture. True artist, he here became absorbed; and absorption still further intensified, it may be, by his striving to abate that strange look of Una; which, though, before others, he had treated with such unconcern, might not, in secret, have been without its thorn.

And so, for the interval, he was oblivious of his creature; which, not oblivious of him, and true to its creation, and true to its heedful winding up, left its post precisely at the given moment; along its well-oiled route, slid noiselessly toward its mark; and, aiming at the hand of Una, to ring one clangorous note, dully smote the intervening brain of Bannadonna, turned backward to it; the manacled arms then instantly upspringing to their hovering poise. The falling body clogged the thing's return; so there it stood, still impending over Bannadonna, as if whispering some post-mortem terror. The chisel lay dropped from the hand, but beside the hand; the oil-flask spilled across the iron track.

In his unhappy end, not unmindful of the rare genius of the mechanician, the republic decreed him a stately funeral. It was resolved that the great bell—the one whose casting had been jeopardised through the timidity of the ill-starred workman—should be rung upon the entrance of the bier into the cathedral. The most robust man of the country round was assigned the office of bell-ringer.

But as the pall-bearers entered the cathedral porch, naught but a broken and disastrous sound, like that of some lone Alpine landslide, fell from the tower upon their ears. And then, all was hushed.

Glancing backward, they saw the groined belfry crashed sideways in. It afterward appeared that the powerful peasant, who had the bell-rope in charge, wishing to test at once the full glory of the bell, had swayed down upon the rope with one concentrate jerk. The mass of quaking metal, too ponderous for its frame, and strangely feeble somewhere at its top, loosed from its fastening, tore sideways down, and tumbling in one sheer fall, three

hundred feet to the soft sward below, buried itself inverted and half out of sight.

Upon its disinterment, the main fracture was found to have started from a small spot in the ear; which, being scraped, revealed a defect, deceptively minute, in the casting; which defect must subsequently have been pasted over with some unknown compound.

Th remolten metal soon reassumed its place in the tower's repaired superstructure. For one year the metallic choir of birds sang musically in its belfry-bough-work of sculptured blinds and traceries. But on the first anniversary of the tower's completion—at early dawn, before the concourse had surrounded it—an earthquake came; one loud crash was heard. The stone-pine, with all its bower of songsters, lay overthrown upon the plain.

So the blind slave obeyed its blinder lord; but, in obedience, slew him. So the creator was killed by the creature. So the bell was too heavy for the tower. So the bell's main weakness was where man's blood had flawed it. And so pride went before the fall.

John Metcalfe

THE DOUBLE ADMIRAL

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I

The story of the Double Admiral presents so many startling and inexplicable features and is altogether so peculiar that were not its truth vouched for by a bishop one might well hesitate to believe it.

The bishop in question, one John Charles, received in the October of last year a letter from an old friend, who invited him to spend a quiet week-end at his seaside bungalow in Hampshire. This friend was a retired admiral, now in failing health, whom John Charles had not seen for several years. The bishop had, however, heard enough of his queer way of life to be curious to visit him and put certain strange rumours to the test, and

moreover, in reading the admiral's letter, he fancied he could detect a peculiar urgency hinting at something more than a mere desire for congenial company.

John Charles at once decided to go, and so, wiring his acceptance and catching an afternoon train after a somewhat hurried lunch, he found himself being greeted by his friend upon the little, wid-swept station only some six hours after the receipt of the letter.

Something was certainly wrong. The hand which shook his was cold and trembling, and the gaiety of welcome was obviously forced.

Reserving any comment upon his friend's appearance for a more convenient time, John Charles chatted the usual amicable nothings as they drove together to the Bungalow. "By the way," said the admiral, as they drew up before the little, white-painted building, "I told you Beverley was here, didn't I? He'll be glad to meet you again. There he is now! I can see him at the window."

Descending from the trap, they stood for a moment in the salt sea-breeze as the driver helped the bishop to take out his luggage. Beverley came forward from the house and shook John Charles' hand.

He was a tall, silent and rather dreamy man with dark eyes and a quantity of black, springy hair. The bishop, who had met him once or twice before, was privately inclined to despise him as an inefficient dabbler in psychology. He had a little, secretive therapeutic establishment in town, where he called himself a "psychist," and interviewed temperamental maidens at a kind of dusky shrine.

When John Charles' luggage had been taken upstairs and the bishop himself had followed it to remove the stains of his rather tiresome cross-country journey, the admiral and Beverley went into the dining-room, where a cheerful fire spluttered and dinner lay temptingly upon the table.

"Beverley," said the admiral, "do you notice anything different in it to-night?"

The psychist turned away from a window to the fire, so that his face shone in a strange mixture of half-lights. "No, Hood," he said.

The admiral walked over to the window, and the two looked out together over a patch of lawn, rather dreary in the failing light, and swept now by a hurrying little breeze.

"You can't see it from this window," resumed the admiral, "it's round the corner—just there." He pointed to one of two other windows that gave on to the sea and the lawn in front. The blinds of both were drawn.

"Does *he* know?" asked Beverley with a meaning lift of his eyebrows.

"No. Not yet. I'll tell him after dinner. Hush, here he comes!"

John Charles entered, and after him the soup, sending up a most inviting steam. As they sat down came the sound of the rising wind, sighing round the cliffs, and panting about the windows like a curious person wanting to look in.

During the meal conversation languished, and it was not until the admiral's man, Thomas, had disappeared, and the three were comfortably seated round the fire, that the host began to talk. He addressed himself particularly to John Charles, whilst Beverley stared into the flames with the resigned, half-grudging air of one who listens to an oft-told tale.

"You're wondering, of course, why I sent for you, John," began the admiral. "You're wondering what's up, what's wrong. I'll tell you. I've told Beverley and got his opinion, and now I'm going to get yours."

The shadow of Beverley's head, flying madly about the far corner of the ceiling, seemed to work in an ecstasy of approval. The admiral glanced at it and at the real Beverley, and went on.

"When you came into this place, John, did you notice anything?"

"I noticed at once how unwell you looked."

"Nothing more?"

"I don't think so."

"Ah." The admiral, sallow and pouchy-faced, bent his dark, restless eyes upon the fire. Outside the wind still whispered curiously. And within, ever and anon, would come the soft hish of falling ash, like a respectful commentary.

"This house," went on the old man, raising his left hand and talking hurriedly, "is Bad, and it's I that am the centre of its badness. You can see that I'm not well; no, but I'm not ill in the ordinary sense either. Listen; I've gone *bad*. Do you know what's wrong? I wonder, if you looked at me very hard, could you guess what's going wrong?"

"Hood," said the bishop breathlessly, "what do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. I told one other man besides Beverley, and—he laughed. By God, I'll kill the man that laughs again! Now look,

look into my eyes, and tell me yourself what you'd say was wrong!"

It completed the strangeness of the situation that the bishop should be asked to answer his own question, yet in the tense, electrical moments that followed he found his brain working to an inevitable conclusion. He was conscious of the old man's black eyes, glowing in the firelight like fervent beads, and conscious, too, of something weird and terrific in his whiskered face; but above all he became subtly aware of what he was to say. The waiting pause grew, as it were, in meaning to the coming answer.

"I think I know what you mean, Hood." For a brief moment he paused again, looking at his friend's sallow face. Yes, there was the answer, evident, written terribly in every line of that wasted countenance. He went on. "You look, somehow, as if something were preying on your mind, as if you were frightened of something. I should almost say, of course it's only a fancy, that you thought you were being tracked, followed. In fact, if you were what you looked, you would be . . . yes, Hood, you would be a haunted man!"

Again there was a silence of some seconds. Beverley knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and the bishop, who found that he had bent forward in the peculiar excitement of the moment, straightened himself up.

The admiral spoke. "It's something we see a long, long way out at sea," he said. "It's not always there, and sometimes it goes altogether."

"What is it?" asked John Charles bluntly.

"We call it an island," said the admiral. "It's a kind of brown stain just on the horizon that comes and goes. Beverley has seen it too."

He stopped, and John Charles looked inquiringly at the psychist, who held his face averted.

"But other people, Hood; what do they say it is?"

Beverley answered. "Other people," he said, "do not see. I do not always see it. I think——"

He broke off suddenly. The admiral was speaking again, and now his words seemed to flow monotonously in a strange unnatural smoothness. His eyes were fixed upon a point on the opposite wall.

"I can't escape from it. It follows me everywhere. Sometimes I come in here, where the blinds are drawn on that side, but it

makes no difference. I can feel it there. It's there now, just there." Without disturbing the rigid fixity of his head, he extended his left arm to the window, pointing.

"Old chap," said the bishop kindly, "you must get away from here at once. Spend a week or two at the Palace. Grace'd love to have you."

The admiral shook his head. "It would be useless," he said. "About a week ago I took the train inland to Eastham. I thought I'd got away from it. I spent most of the day there without seeing it, and then, as I was having tea in a little restaurant, I looked up out of the window. There it was, far away over the top of a hill, the same brown, evil shape——" He paused, and into his eyes crept a look of terror. The woodwork round the windows ticked meditatively in the wind, and ash fell again from the fire—sympathetically.

"The important point to ntoice," remarked Beverley, "is that the sight or even the thought of this thing is accompanied in Hood's case by a distinct waning or attenuation of personality. A continual tapping or sapping-away of mind; how did you describe it, Hood?"

The admiral answered, his head thrust forward towards the wall over his long legs, "When It comes I seem to lose something. I can tell when It's coming. I have an awful headache first. Then something seems to be drawn out of me, sucked away. I can't explain it. Yes——"

He broke off, excited, seeking, as it seemed, for words. The firelight dancing on his face showed up long wrinkles playing over it as his mouth worked quickly. The two listeners were about to interrupt him, but swiftly he hushed them with his hand.

"—Virtue or something. It's gone, and I can feel it drawn away from me over the sea. I've felt like this before, as a child. As if something inside wanted to break away and fasten on to something else. That's it."

"Do you know," said John Charles, "I was like that, something, when I was a kid. Certain things had the most awful, indescribable horror about them. . . . A yellow stain on the ceiling in my room, a particular picture in an old book (I used to know the number of the page and skip it so I wouldn't come upon it), an old, broken post along the railway line to school . . . It's funny."

"Old chaps like me," went on the admiral, waving at them as

the woodwork ticked feelingly about the window-frames, and the psychist and the bishop, somehow saddened by the sound, looked regretfully about them, "—Old chaps like me are set on in this way. Such poor old chaps. Listen! I shall go out one day and meet the Thing. It's killing me. I—I—I am being undermined!"

II

The bishop takes up his story at the point where, on the following day, they set out in the admiral's cutter to visit the mysterious island. It is apparent that he joined in the amazing expedition with the prime object of humouring his old friend, particularly as he was quite unable to see anything more terrifying than a few trails of low-lying cloud hanging over that portion of the horizon to which the admiral pointed. He had eaten a hearty breakfast, and was impatient of the terrific moments of last night's talk.

It was about ten when they started off, and John Charles, sausage-like in his white sweater, looked somewhat regretfully over the stern at the receding shore. A light, shimmering haze hung about, but the sun promised soon to dissipate it.

For some time the bishop, who was very content to leave the management of the boat in other hands, sat back, comfortably pulling at his pipe and thinking deeply. He was extremely sorry that his friend was suffering from such an unexampled attack of nerves, and renewed his resolution to get the admiral away to the Palace. No other possibility than that of "nerves" ever presented itself to his mind—the conversation of last night seemed particularly silly in the sane morning light, and even the tragic and mysterious Beverley looked fairly normal in his boating flannels.

Seated under the boom, the admiral was gazing over the sea before him. He was crouching forward with his head stuck out, so that his hands dangled between his knees. Some wisps of lightish hair, faded like his whole appearance, were caught and blown about his forehead by the wind. Sometimes they would get into his eyes, and then impatiently he would put up a hand, but apart from this he was sitting in a strangely tense and rigid way.

Idly the bishop watched the trysail above him so smoothly curving outwards in the breeze. Fixing his eyes on the truck of the mast, he followed it as it plunged in and out among the

clouds, tracing shining lines and patterns with the motion of the ship. Gulls about the coast screamed, bickering, and ever and anon the pleasant break of dry and straining ropes came rhythmically. John Charles was very comfortable and exceedingly disinclined to worry over anything. Happily he dozed, cherubic.

Presently, however, Beverley aroused him to take his place at the tiller. He did so, relighting his pipe which had gone out. Half an hour must have passed since they set out, and they were making fair progress though the wind was light and shifting. Up to this time they had hardly exchanged a word.

As they left the shore behind them and stole forwards, with some tacking, in the supposed direction of the island, a peculiar feeling began to settle over them. The strangeness of the expedition, which so far had, as it were, passed itself off as a holiday trip, again became apparent, and above all the silent figure of Hood, sitting unnaturally still, filled them with vague misgiving. About this time, too, the rather sinister visage of the psychist, suddenly swinging round and snapping its eyes at John Charles, reminded that dismayed prelate of the very picture that had so terrified him as a child.

"How far are we from the shore now?" asked John Charles, less from interest in their position than from a keen desire to break the silence. "About three miles," answered Beverley. "You can't get much out of her in a wind like this. Is the course right, Hood?"

"Keep straight on for a bit," said the admiral, "straight on. We are getting near."

Again there was a long break in the conversation, and again an indescribable feeling of misgiving settled over John Charles. Something in the dreamy, sunlit day, something in the light, wandering winds, seemed growing tense and strained to breaking-point. As the water lap-lapped against the sides of the cutter, and the tiller creaked in his hands, an almost uncontrollable desire to cry out came over him. This, however, he resisted, and they proceeded in silence as before.

It was now, when the bishop was in the grip of these strange forebodings, that he saw the island for the first time. For some little while he seemed to have been half-conscious of a darkish shape that dodged behind the mast with the movement of the boat, but it was not until this moment, as the cutter tacked suddenly to port, that the sombre smudge upon the sea rushed, as it were, to the opposite side, and hung over the starboard bow.

"Look!" whispered John Charles to Beverley, pointing at the shape.

Beverley nodded but made no reply. He was looking intently at the admiral, who still sat motionless, staring straight before him.

The dark mass that they were approaching was curiously vague in outline. Straining his eyes at it, the bishop thought he could make out the appearance of cliffs, but owing to its distance, and the peculiar haze that hung about it, it was impossible to determine anything with clearness.

They held on their course for about another five minutes, and then tacked again so that the island was brought on to the port side. Beverley was looking at it through a telescope, which he presently handed to the bishop.

Nothing more was to be made out through the telescope than was visible to the naked eye. A brown shade seemed brooding over all that portion of the sea, contrasting strangely with the sunlight that shifted on the water lying wide around. John Charles turned the telescope to the shore they had left, and then swept the horizon. Far away a large, three-masted barque was making up channel, and to the west a dark speck upon the sea, that might be a sloop beating to windward, was slowly creeping in their direction. Than this not a sign of life was to be seen.

John Charles offered the telescope to the admiral, but the rigid figure made no motion, so he returned the instrument to Beverley.

The wind, which at the best had been but light, now almost quite forsook them, and they crept with irritating slowness through the water. Strangely enough, however, the boat which John Charles had noticed a minute or two before had now approached to within about three-quarters of a mile, and seemed to travel in the tail of the departing breeze.

Beverley was looking at it curiously. Presently he put up the telescope and gazed long and fixedly.

With his naked eye John Charles could see easily that the boat was cutter-rigged, and might, indeed, be an exact replica of their own. Further, three dark figures were seated on the deck, one at the tiller, one beneath the boom, and one, darker and plainer than the other two, craning forward under the mast.

In the warm, creeping sunlight the bishop felt himself shivering. His head was aching violently, and he had for a moment that strong sensation of contradictory motion that sometimes comes upon one in a train. He could have sworn that somehow the

direction in which they were travelling was not that of a minute ago.

"Hood," whispered Beverley to the admiral, "look at that boat, Hood."

There was no reply.

The psychist strode over to the mast where the admiral was sitting, and John Charles, from his station by the tiller, saw that his face went suddenly drawn and ashy. "God!" he cried out to the bishop. "Come here! He's gone, poor old chap!"

John Charles leapt to his feet and joined Beverley. Together they looked down at the thing below them.

Still rigid as if carved in wood, the figure of the admiral sat staring out to sea. In this rigidity even the chin was thrust forward with a horrible appearance of jocose truculence, and only the long arms still dangled slackly between the knees with the motion of the vessel. In the big, blue eyes wisps of pale hair were blowing in the wind.

With a cry of dismay the bishop went up to the corpse and shook it gently. It heeled over, and fell half-prostrate against the mast, but the pale eyes remained fixed, staring ever forwards.

Beverley bent down, and put a hand against the figure's heart. "Dead," he said. "It's no go, Charles!"

"Beverley," asked the bishop, "Beverley, how did he die?"

The psychist made no reply. Instead he took up the telescope again, pointing it at the boat that had passed them a few minutes back. It must have been moving very rapidly, for its three queer figures were no longer discernible, and it was fast fading from sight, pitching and tossing, as it seemed, into the gathering mist ahead.

Suddenly Beverley spoke. "Do you know where Hood is?" he said.

The bishop looked at him in amazement and made no reply.

"I'll tell you where he is," went on Beverley, and of all words John Charles had ever heard those that now followed seemed most fraught with sinister suggestion. "I'll tell you where Hood is; he's in that boat that passed us, along with you and me. I saw him through the telescope."

As he let the import of these words sink into his mind the bishop stood gazing, now at Beverley, now at the body of the dead that, like some frightful doll, sat staring past him into vacancy. Then he looked at the sea around them, and a fresh confusion mingled with his fear.

He was facing the stern, and far away he saw the uncanny boat, now but a dark speck in the distance. And to its left, where the shore should have appeared, was visible instead a vaguer mass that lay upon the water like a huge, dun cloud. Hastily the bishop turned and looked for what had been the island. As he half expected, it was gone, and in its place stretched out the shore that they had left.

There is a peculiar momentary condition of mind which psychologists have styled "vertigo of direction." It may be brought about by coming out suddenly on a familiar place by an unaccustomed way so that ideas of relative positions receive a violent and bewildering contradiction. In some persons the shock may even be so great as to cause temporary mental incapacity, and John Charles for some seconds remained half-stunned whilst his mental compass achieved reluctant readjustment.

It was true enough. The bishop's uneasy sense of contrary motion had received a sudden confirmation, and in the peculiar bewilderment of the reversal he even forgot for a moment the existence of Beverley and the horror of the admiral's death.

Before them lay the shore as they had left it an hour or more ago. There was the tall cliff that rose to the east of the slip, and there in the background the billowy stretches of the downs lit up queerly by moving points and splashes and slowly creeping bands of yellow light. For some time, unable to shake off the persistent notion of the original seaboard at his back, the bishop felt as though something, playing frightful pranks with Nature, had set up against the familiar Hampshire coast another shore that answered to it hill for hill and cliff for cliff.

A queer, exotic quality seemed loose upon the air. Soft winds were blowing, and within John Charles' head the violent aching passed away and a host of yearning little tunes arose. Something unreal, something of the dreamy shimmer of the mirage, seemed to hang about the sunlit coast before him. Out of the golden haze strange shapes seemed to tower and beckon to the bishop. . . .

He stood looking at them, oblivious of all else, his features drawn with pain. The prospect seemed beset by a haunting beauty, a sweet, fantastic madness. Those cliffs that hung above the gentle sea . . . The bishop prayed to them in a fierce agony of desire as to a face half-mocking and torturingly dear.

Now he reeled. He was gone haggard with this beauty. Gusts out of the ineffable breathed upon him. He clutched at the collar

of his sweater and prayed again. "Our Father," he said. Dimly, as he was falling, he glimpsed Beverley out of the corner of his eye. He was conscious of a dislike of Beverley. He wore dirty flannels, which psychists should never do. . . . No. . . . A shower of strange inconsequences, a last mad scamper of flying thoughts, a last vain effort to size up the tremendous and perplexing things that had assailed his mind, and then . . . oblivion, purple-tinted and delicious. A lordly thing.

One of the most human and pathetic points in John Charles' remarkable but evidently sincere narration is the way in which he describes his attitude to the Second Admiral that he discovered upon awaking. "Everything," said Beverley, "depends upon the completeness of the reversal. This man is to all intents and purposes your old friend. Think of an hour-glass; when the sand begins to fall from the upper into the lower bulb we have what can be called a leaking or sapping away of the higher mass, but as the process nears completion it is better to speak of the construction of the lower than the destruction of the higher."

"Beverley," asked the bishop, "has the sand nearly all trickled through?"

"I think so," answered the psychist, "the second Hood appeared as you were unconscious. That was seven hours ago."

The last scene that it is needful to record took place the same evening. Disaster, says the bishop, overtook the kindly efforts of Beverley and himself to hide from their friend the real nature of the case. John Charles was describing his sensations to the psychist, when suddenly the admiral, whom they had believed to be upstairs, came in upon them. It presently appeared that he had overheard their conversation and was curious to learn its import.

The bishop forced a laugh. "I've just had a nap," he said. "What I was telling Beverley was a dream. Something you gave me for supper last night has evidently played the very dickens with my constitution."

Beverley grinned. "Very realistic," he said, "particularly the last bit about the belovéd cliffs. Most oriental. Like Omar Khayyàm gone a little mad. That, of course, was the cucumber."

The admiral poked the fire. "No," he said slowly. "No, Beverley, old chap, I'm afraid that won't hold water."

"Why not?" they chorused hoarsely.

"Because," said the admiral—and a world of terror was throb-

bing in his voice—"because, unfortunately, I've had a nap as well, and—I've had the same dream too!"

Mrs. Oliphant

THE LIBRARY WINDOW

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I

I was not aware at first of the many discussions which had gone on about that window. It was almost opposite one of the windows of the large old-fashioned drawing-room of the house in which I spent that summer, which was of so much importance in my life. Our house and the library were on opposite sides of the broad High Street of St. Rule's, which is a fine street, wide and ample, and very quiet, as strangers think who come from noisier places; but in a summer evening there is much coming and going, and the stillness is full of sound—the sound of footsteps and pleasant voices, softened by the summer air. There are even exceptional moments when it is noisy: the time of the fair, and on Saturday night sometimes, and when there are excursion trains. Then even the softest sunny air of the evening will not smooth the harsh tones and the stumbling steps; but at these unlovely moments we shut the windows, and even I, who am so fond of that deep recess where I can take refuge from all that is going on inside, and make myself a spectator of all the varied story out of doors, withdraw from my watch-tower. To tell the truth, there never was very much going on inside. The house belonged to my aunt, to whom (she says, Thank God!) nothing ever happens. I believe that many things have happened to her in her time; but that was all over at the period of which I am speaking, and she was old, and very quiet. Her life went on in a routine never broken. She got up at the same hour every day, and did the same things in the same rotation, day by day the same. She said that this was the greatest support in the world, and that routine is a kind of salvation. It may be so; but it is a very dull salvation,

and I used to feel that I would rather have incident, whatever kind of incident it might be. But then at that time I was not old, which makes all the difference.

At the time of which I speak the deep recess of the drawing-room window was a great comfort to me. Though she was an old lady (perhaps because she was so old) she was very tolerant, and had a kind of feeling for me. She never said a word, but often gave me a smile when she saw how I had built myself up, with my books and my basket of work. I did very little work, I fear—now and then a few stitches when the spirit moved me, or when I had got well afloat in a dream, and was more tempted to follow it out than to read my books, as sometimes happened. At other times, and if the book were interesting, I used to get through volume after volume sitting there, paying no attention to anybody. And yet I did pay a kind of attention. Aunt Mary's old ladies came in to call, and I heard them talk, though I very seldom listened; but for all that, if they had anything to say that was interesting, it is curious how I found it in my mind afterwards, as if the air had blown it to me. They came and went, and I had the sensation of their old bonnets gliding out and in, and their dresses rustling; and now and then had to jump up and shake hands with some one who knew me, and asked after my papa and mamma. Then Aunt Mary would give me a little smile again, and I slipped back to my window. She never seemed to mind. My mother would not have let me do it, I know. She would have remembered dozens of things there were to do. She would have sent me upstairs to fetch something which I was quite sure she did not want, or downstairs to carry some quite unnecessary message to the housemaid. She liked to keep me running about. Perhaps that was one reason why I was so fond of Aunt Mary's drawing-room, and the deep recess of the window, and the curtain that fell half over it, and the broad window-seat, where one could collect so many things without being found fault with for untidiness. Whenever we had anything the matter with us in these days, we were sent to St. Rule's to get up our strength. And this was my case at the time of which I am going to speak.

Everybody had said, since ever I learned to speak, that I was fantastic and fanciful and dreamy, and all the other words with which a girl who may happen to like poetry, and to be fond of thinking, is so often made uncomfortable. People don't know what they mean when they say fantastic. It sounds like Madge

Wildfire or something of that sort. My mother thought I should always be busy, to keep nonsense out of my head. But really I was not at all fond of nonsense. I was rather serious than otherwise. I would have been no trouble to anybody if I had been left to myself. It was only that I had a sort of second-sight, and was conscious of things to which I paid no attention. Even when reading the most interesting book, the things that were being talked about blew in to me; and I heard what the people were saying in the streets as they passed under the window. Aunt Mary always said I could do two or indeed three things at once—both read and listen, and see. I am sure that I did not listen much, and seldom looked out, of set purpose—as some people do who notice what bonnets the ladies in the street have on; but I did hear what I couldn't help hearing, even when I was reading my book, and I did see all sorts of things, though often for a whole half-hour I might never lift my eyes.

This does not explain what I said at the beginning, that there were many discussions about that window. It was, and still is, the last window in the row, of the College Library, which is opposite my aunt's house in the High Street. Yet it is not exactly opposite, but a little to the west, so that I could see it best from the left side of my recess. I took it calmly for granted that it was a window like any other till I first heard the talk about it which was going on in the drawing-room. "Have you never made up your mind, Mrs. Balcarres," said old Mr. Pitmilly, "whether that window opposite is a window or no?" He said Mistress Balcarres —and he was always called Mr. Pitmilly Morton: which was the name of his place.

"I am never sure of it, to tell the truth," said Aunt Mary, "all these years."

"Bless me!" said one of the old ladies, "and what window may that be?"

Mr. Pitmilly had a way of laughing as he spoke, which did not please me; but it was true that he was not perhaps desirous of pleasing me. He said, "Oh, just the window opposite," with his laugh running through his words; "our friend can never make up her mind about it, though she has been living opposite it since——"

"You need never mind the date," said another; "the Leebrary window! Dear me, what should it be but a window? up at that height it could not be a door."

"The question is," said my aunt, "if it is a real window with

glass in it, or if it is merely painted, or if it once was a window, and has been built up. And the oftener people look at it, the less they are able to say."

"Let me see this window," said old Lady Carnbee, who was very active and strong-minded; and then they all came crowding upon me—three or four old ladies, very eager, and Mr. Pitmilly's white hair appearing over their heads, and my aunt sitting quiet and smiling behind.

"I mind the window very well," said Lady Carnbee; "ay: and so do more than me. But in its present appearance it is just like any other window; but has not been cleaned, I should say, in the memory of man."

"I see what ye mean," said one of the others. "It is just a very dead thing without any reflection in it; but I've seen as bad before."

"Ay, it's dead enough," said another, "but that's no rule; for these huzzies of women-servants in this ill age——"

"Nay, the women are well enough," said the softest voice of all, which was Aunt Mary's. "I will never let them risk their lives cleaning the outside of mine. And there are no women-servants in the Old Library: there is maybe something more in it than that."

They were all pressing into my recess, pressing upon me, a row of old faces, peering into something they could not understand. I had a sense in my mind how curious it was, the wall of old ladies in their old satin gowns all glazed with age, Lady Carnbee with her lace about her head. Nobody was looking at me or thinking of me; but I feel unconsciously the contrast of my youngness to their oldness, and stared at them as they stared over my head at the Library window. I had given it no attention up to this time. I was more taken up with the old ladies than with the thing they were looking at.

"The framework is all right at least, I can see that, and pented black——"

"And the panes are pented black too. It's no window, Mrs. Balcarres. It has been filled in, in the days of the window duties: you will mind, Leddy Carnbee."

"Mind!" said that oldest lady. "I mind when your mother was marriet, Jeanie: and that's neither the day nor yesterday. But as for the window, it's just a delusion: and that is my opinion of the matter, if you ask me."

"There's a great want of light in that muckle room at the

college," said another. "If it was a window, the Leebrary would have more light."

"One thing is clear," said one of the younger ones, "it cannot be a window to see through. It may be filled in or it may be built up, but it is not a window to give light."

"And who ever heard of a window that was no to see through?" Lady Carnbee said. I was fascinated by the look on her face, which was a curious scornful look as of one who knew more than she chose to say: and then my wandering fancy was caught by her hand as she held it up, throwing back the lace that drooped over it. Lady Carnbee's lace was the chief thing about her—heavy black Spanish lace with large flowers. Everything she wore was trimmed with it. A large veil of it hung over her old bonnet. But her hand coming out of this heavy lace was a curious thing to see. She had very long fingers, very taper, which had been much admired in her youth; and her hand was very white, or rather more than white, pale, bleached, and bloodless, with large blue veins standing up upon the back; and she wore some fine rings, among others a big diamond in an ugly old claw setting. They were too big for her, and were wound round and round with yellow silk to make them keep on: and this little cushion of silk, turned brown with long wearing, had twisted round so that it was more conspicuous than the jewels; while the big diamond blazed underneath in the hollow of her hand, like some dangerous thing hiding and sending out darts of light. The hand, which seemed to come almost to a point, with this strange ornament underneath, clutched at my half-terrified imagination. It too seemed to mean far more than was said. I felt as if it might clutch me with sharp claws, and the lurking, dazzling creature bite—with a sting that would go to the heart.

Presently, however, the circle of the old faces broke up, the old ladies returned to their seats, and Mr. Pitmilly, small but very erect, stood up in the midst of them, talking with mild authority like a little oracle among the ladies. Only Lady Carnbee always contradicted the neat, little old gentleman. She gesticulated, when she talked, like a Frenchwoman, and darted forth that hand of hers with the lace hanging over it, so that I always caught a glimpse of the lurking diamond. I thought she looked like a witch among the comfortable little group which gave such attention to everything Mr. Pitmilly said.

"For my part, it is my opinion there is no window there at all,"

he said. "It's very like the thing that's called in scienteefic language an optical illusion. It arises generally, if I may use such a word in the presence of ladies, from a liver that is not just in the perfitt order and balance that organ demands—and then you will see things—a blue dog, I remember, was the thing in one case, and in another——"

"The man has gane gyte," said Lady Carnbee; "I mind the windows in the Auld Leebrary as long as I mind anything. Is the Leebrary itself an optical illusion too?"

"Na, na," and "No, no," said the old ladies; "a blue dogue would be a strange vagary: but the Library we have all kent from our youth," said one. "And I mind when the Assemblies were held there one year when the Town Hall was building," another said.

"It is just a great divert to me," said Aunt Mary: but what was strange was that she paused there, and said in a low tone, "now": and then went on again, "for whoever comes to my house, there are aye discussions about that window. I have never just made up my mind about it myself. Sometimes I think it's a case of these wicked window duties, as you said, Miss Jeanie, when half the windows in our houses were blocked up to save the tax. And then, I think, it may be due to that blank kind of building like the great new buildings on the Earthen Mound in Edinburgh, where the windows are just ornaments. And then whiles I am sure I can see the glass shining when the sun catches it in the afternoon."

"You could so easily satisfy yourself, Mrs. Balcarres, if you were to——"

"Give a laddie a penny to cast a stone, and see what happens," said Lady Carnbee.

"But I am not sure that I have any desire to satisfy myself," Aunt Mary said. And then there was a stir in the room, and I had to come out from my recess and open the door for the old ladies and see them downstairs, as they all went away following one another. Mr. Pitmilly gave his arm to Lady Carnbee, though she was always contradicting him; and so the tea-party dispersed. Aunt Mary came to the head of the stairs with her guests in an old-fashioned gracious way, while I went down with them to see that the maid was ready at the door. When I came back Aunt Mary was still standing in the recess looking out. Returning to my seat she said, with a kind of wistful look, "Well, honey: and what is your opinion?"

"I have no opinion. I was reading my book all the time," I said.

"And so you were, honey, and no' very civil; but all the same I ken well you heard every word we said."

II

It was a night in June; dinner was long over, and had it been winter the maids would have been shutting up the house, and my Aunt Mary preparing to go upstairs to her room. But it was still clear daylight, that daylight out of which the sun has been long gone, and which has no longer any rose reflections, but all has sunk into a pearly neutral tint—a light which is daylight yet is not day. We had taken a turn in the garden after dinner, and now we had returned to what we called our usual occupations. My aunt was reading. The English post had come in, and she had got her *Times,* which was her great diversion. The *Scotsman* was her morning reading, but she liked her *Times* at night.

As for me, I too was at my usual occupation, which at that time was doing nothing. I had a book as usual, and was absorbed in it; but I was conscious of all that was going on all the same. The people strolled along the broad pavement, making remarks as they passed under the open window which came up into my story or my dream, and sometimes made me laugh. The tone and the faint sing-song, or rather chant, of the accent, which was "a wee Fifish," was novel to me, and associated with holiday, and pleasant; and sometimes they said to each other something that was amusing, and often something that suggested a whole story; but presently they began to drop off, the footsteps slackened, the voices died away. It was getting late, though the clear soft daylight went on and on. All through the lingering evening, which seemed to consist of interminable hours, long but not weary, drawn out as if the spell of the light and the outdoor life might never end, I had now and then, quite unawares, cast a glance at the mysterious window which my aunt and her friends had discussed, as I felt, though I dared not say it even to myself, rather foolishly. It caught my eye without any intention on my part, as I paused, as it were, to take breath, in the flowing and current of undistinguishable thoughts and things from without and within which carried me along. First it occurred to me, with a little sensation of discovery, how absurd to say it was not a

window, a living window, one to see through! Why, then, had they never *seen* it, these old folk? I saw as I looked up suddenly the faint greyness as of visible space within—a room behind, certainly—dim, as it was natural a room should be on the other side of the street—quite indefinite: yet so clear that if some one were to come to the window there would be nothing surprising in it. For certainly there was a feeling of space behind the panes which these old half-blind ladies had disputed about whether they were glass or only fictitious panes marked on the wall. How silly! when eyes that could see could make it out in a minute. It was only a greyness at present, but it was unmistakable, a space that went back into gloom, as every room does when you look into it across a street. There were no curtains to show whether it was inhabited or not; but a room—oh, as distinctly as ever room was! I was pleased with myself, but said nothing, while Aunt Mary rustled her paper, waiting for a favourable moment to announce a discovery which settled her problem at once. Then I was carried away upon the stream again, and forgot the window, till somebody threw unawares a word from the outer world, "I'm goin' hame; it'll soon be dark." Dark! what was the fool thinking of? it never would be dark if one waited out, wandering in the soft air for hours longer; and then my eyes, acquiring easily that new habit, looked across the way again.

Ah, now! nobody indeed had come to the window; and no light had been lighted, seeing it was still beautiful to read by—a still, clear, colourless light; but the room inside had certainly widened. I could see the grey space and air a little deeper, and a sort of vision, very dim, of a wall, and something against it; something dark, with the blackness that a solid article, however indistinctly seen, takes in the lighter darkness that is only space—a large, black, dark thing coming out into the grey. I looked more intently, and made sure it was a piece of furniture, either a writing-table or perhaps a large bookcase. No doubt it must be the last, since this was part of the old library. I never visited the old College Library, but I had seen such places before, and I could well imagine it to myself. How curious that for all the time these old people had looked at it, they had never seen this before!

It was more silent now, and my eyes, I suppose, had grown dim with gazing, doing my best to make it out, when suddenly Aunt Mary said, "Will you ring the bell, my dear? I must have my lamp."

"Your lamp?" I cried, "when it is still daylight." But then I

gave another look at my window, and perceived with a start that the light had indeed changed: for now I saw nothing. It was still light, but there was so much change in the light that my room, with the grey space and the large shadowy bookcase, had gone out, and I saw them no more: for even a Scotch night in June, though it looks as if it would never end, does darken at the last. I had almost cried out, but checked myself, and rang the bell for Aunt Mary, and made up my mind I would say nothing till next morning, when to be sure naturally it would be more clear.

Next morning I rather think I forgot all about it—or was busy: or was more idle than usual: the two things meant nearly the same. At all events I thought no more of the window, though I still sat in my own, opposite to it, but occupied with some other fancy. Aunt Mary's visitors came as usual in the afternoon; but their talk was of other things, and for a day or two nothing at all happened to bring back my thoughts into this channel. It might be nearly a week before the subject came back, and once more it was old Lady Carnbee who set me thinking; not that she said anything upon that particular theme. But she was the last of my aunt's afternoon guests to go away, and when she rose to leave she threw up her hands, with those lively gesticulations which so many old Scotch ladies have. "My faith!" said she, "there is that bairn there still like a dream. Is the creature bewitched, Mary Balcarres? and is she bound to sit there by night and by day for the rest of her days? You should mind that there's things about, uncanny for women of our blood."

I was too much startled at first to recognise that it was of me she was speaking. She was like a figure in a picture, with her pale face the colour of ashes, and the big pattern of the Spanish lace hanging half over it, and her hand held up, with the big diamond blazing at me from the inside of her uplifted palm. It was held up in surprise, but it looked as if it were raised in malediction; and the diamond threw out darts of light and glared and twinkled at me. If it had been in its right place it would not have mattered; but there, in the open of the hand! I started up, half in terror, half in wrath. And then the old lady laughed, and her hand dropped. "I've wakened you to life, and broke the spell," she said, nodding her old head at me, while the large black silk flowers of the lace waved and threatened. And she took my arm to go downstairs, laughing and bidding me be steady, and no' tremble and shake like a broken reed. "You should be as steady as a rock at your age. I was like a young tree," she said, leaning so heavily that my wil-

lowy girlish frame quivered—"I was a support to virtue, like Pamela, in my time."

"Aunt Mary, Lady Carnbee is a witch!" I cried, when I came back.

"Is that what you think, honey? well: maybe she once was," said Aunt Mary, whom nothing surprised.

And it was that night once more after dinner, and after the post came in, and *The Times,* that I suddenly saw the Library window again. I had seen it every day—and noticed nothing; but to-night, still in a little tumult of mind over Lady Carnbee and her wicked diamond which wished me harm, and her lace which waved threats and warnings at me, I looked across the street, and there I saw quite plainly the room opposite, far more clear than before. I saw dimly that it must be a large room, and that the big piece of furniture against the wall was a writing-desk. That in a moment, when first my eyes rested upon it, was quite clear: a large old-fashioned escritoire, standing out into the room: and I knew by the shape of it that it had a great many pigeon-holes and little drawers in the back, and a large table for writing. There was one just like it in my father's library at home. It was such a surprise to see it all so clearly that I closed my eyes, for the moment almost giddy, wondering how papa's desk could have come here —and then when I reminded myself that this was nonsense, and that there were many such writing-tables besides papa's, and looked again—lo! it had all become quite vague and indistinct as it was at first; and I saw nothing but the blank window, of which the old ladies could never be certain whether it was filled up to avoid the window-tax, or whether it had ever been a window at all.

This occupied my mind very much, and yet I did not say anything to Aunt Mary. For one thing, I rarely saw anything at all in the early part of the day; but then that is natural: you can never see into a place from outside, whether it is an empty room or a looking-glass, or people's eyes, or anything else that is mysterious, in the day. It has, I suppose, something to do with the light. But in the evening in June in Scotland—then is the time to see. For it is daylight, yet it is not day, and there is a quality in it which I cannot describe, it is so clear, as if every object was a reflection of itself.

I used to see more and more of the room as the days went on. The large escritoire stood out more and more into the space: with sometimes white glimmering things, which looked like papers,

lying on it: and once or twice I was sure I saw a pile of books on the floor close to the writing-table, as if they had gilding upon them in broken specks, like old books. It was always about the time when the lads in the street began to call to each other that they were going home, and sometimes a shriller voice would come from one of the doors, bidding somebody to "cry upon the laddies" to come back to their suppers. That was always the time I saw best, though it was close upon the moment when the veil seemed to fall and the clear radiance became less living, and all the sounds died out of the street, and Aunt Mary said in her soft voice, "Honey! will you ring for the lamp?" She said honey as people say darling: and I think it is a prettier word.

Then finally, while I sat one evening with my book in my hand, looking straight across the street, not distracted by anything, I saw a little movement within. It was not any one visible—but everybody must know what it is to see the stir in the air, the little disturbance—you cannot tell what it is, but that it indicates some one there, even though you can see no one. Perhaps it is a shadow making just one flicker in the still place. You may look at an empty room and the furniture in it for hours, and then suddenly there will be the flicker, and you know that something has come into it. It might only be a dog or a cat; it might be, if that were possible, a bird flying across; but it is some one, something living, which is so different, so completely different, in a moment from the things that are not living. It seemed to strike right through me, and I gave a little cry. Then Aunt Mary stirred a little, and put down the huge newspaper that almost covered her from sight, and said, "What is it, honey?" I cried "Nothing," with a little gasp, quickly, for I did not want to be disturbed just at this moment when somebody was coming! But I suppose she was not satisfied, for she got up and stood behind to see what it was, putting her hand on my shoulder. It was the softest touch in the world, but I could have flung it off angrily: for that moment everything was still again, and the place grew grey and I saw no more.

"Nothing," I repeated, but I was so vexed I could have cried. "I told you it was nothing, Aunt Mary. Don't you believe me, that you come to look—and spoil it all!"

I did not mean of course to say these last words; they were forced out of me. I was so much annoyed to see it all melt away like a dream: for it was no dream, but as real as—as real as—myself or anything I ever saw.

She gave my shoulder a little pat with her hand. "Honey," she said, "were you looking at something? Is't that? is't that?" "Is it what?" I wanted to say, shaking off her hand, but something in me stopped me: for I said nothing at all, and she went quietly back to her place. I suppose she must have rung the bell herself, for immediately I felt the soft flood of the light behind me and the evening outside dimmed down, as it did every night, and I saw nothing more.

It was next day, I think, in the afternoon that I spoke. It was brought on by something she said about her fine work. "I get a mist before my eyes," she said; "you will have to learn my old lace stitches, honey—for I soon will not see to draw the threads."

"Oh, I hope you will keep your sight," I cried, without thinking what I was saying. I was then young and very matter-of-fact. I had not found out that one may mean something, yet not half or a hundredth part of what one seems to mean: and even then probably hoping to be contradicted if it is anyhow against one's self.

"My sight!" she said, looking up at me with a look that was almost angry; "there is no question of losing my sight—on the contrary, my eyes are very strong. I may not see to draw fine threads, but I see at a distance as well as ever I did—as well as you do."

"I did not mean any harm. Aunt Mary," I said. "I thought you said—— But how can your sight be as good as ever when you are in doubt about that window? I can see into the room as clear as——" My voice wavered, for I had just looked up and across the street, and I could have sworn that there was no window at all, but only a false image of one painted on the wall.

"Ah!" she said, with a little tone of keenness and of surprise: and she half rose up, throwing down her work hastily, as if she meant to come to me: then, perhaps seeing the bewildered look on my face, she paused and hesitated—"Ay, honey!" she said, "have you got so far ben as that?"

What did she mean? Of course I knew all the old Scotch phrases as well as I knew myself; but it is a comfort to take refuge in a little ignorance, and I know I pretended not to understand whenever I was put out. "I don't know what you mean by 'far ben,'" I cried out, very impatient. I don't know what might have followed, but some one just then came to call, and she could only give me a look before she went forward, putting out her hand to her visitor. It was a very soft look, but anxious, and as if she did

not know what to do: and she shook her head a very little, and I thought, though there was a smile on her face, there was something wet about her eyes. I retired into my recess, and nothing more was said.

But it was very tantalising that it should fluctuate so; for sometimes I saw that room quite plain and clear—quite as clear as I could see papa's library, for example, when I shut my eyes. I compared it naturally to my father's study, because of the shape of the writing-table, which, as I tell you, was the same as his. At times I saw the papers on the table quite plain, just as I had seen his papers many a day. And the little pile of books on the floor at the foot—not ranged regularly in order, but put down one above the other, with all their angles going different ways, and a speck of the old gilding shining here and there. And then again at other times I saw nothing, absolutely nothing, and was no better than the old ladies who had peered over my head, drawing their eyelids together, and arguing that the window had been shut up because of the old long-abolished window tax, or else that it had never been a window at all. It annoyed me very much at those dull moments to feel that I too puckered up my eyelids and saw no better than they.

Aunt Mary's old ladies came and went day after day while June went on. I was to go back in July, and I felt that I should be very unwilling indeed to leave until I had quite cleared up—as I was indeed in the way of doing—the mystery of that window which changed so strangely and appeared quite a different thing, not only to different people, but to the same eyes at different times. Of course I said to myself it must simply be an effect of the light. And yet I did not quite like that explanation either, but would have been better pleased to make out to myself that it was some superiority in me which made it so clear to me, if it were only the great superiority of young eyes over old—though that was not quite enough to satisfy me, seeing it was a superiority which I shared with every little lass and lad in the street. I rather wanted, I believe, to think that there was some particular insight in me which gave clearness to my sight—which was a most impertinent assumption, but really did not mean half the harm it seems to mean when it is put down here in black and white. I had several times again, however, seen the room quite plain, and made out that it was a large room, with a great picture in a dim gilded frame hanging on the farther wall, and many other pieces of solid furniture making a blackness here and there, besides the

great escritoire against the wall, which had evidently been placed near the window for the sake of the light. One thing became visible to me after another, till I almost thought I should end by being able to read the old lettering on one of the big volumes which projected from the others and caught the light; but this was all preliminary to the great event which happened about Midsummer Day—the day of St. John, which was once so much thought of as a festival, but now means nothing at all in Scotland any more than any other of the saints' days: which I shall always think a great pity and loss to Scotland, whatever Aunt Mary may say.

III

It was about midsummer, I cannot say exactly to a day when, but near that time, when the great event happened. I had grown very well acquainted by this time with that large dim room. Not only the escritoire, which was very plain to me now, with the papers upon it, and the books at its foot, but the great picture that hung against the farther wall, and various other shadowy pieces of furniture, especially a chair which one evening I saw had been moved into the space before the escritoire,—a little change which made my heart beat, for it spoke so distinctly of some one who must have been there, the some one who had already made me start, two or three times before, by some vague shadow of him or thrill of him which made a sort of movement in the silent space: a movement which made me sure that next minute I must see something or hear something which would explain the whole—if it were not that something always happened outside to stop it, at the very moment of its accomplishment. I had no warning this time of movement or shadow. I had been looking into the room very attentively a little while before, and had made out everything almost clearer than ever; and then had bent my attention again on my book, and read a chapter or two at a most exciting period of the story: and consequently had quite left St. Rule's, and the High Street, and the College Library, and was really in a South American forest, almost throttled by the flowery creepers, and treading softly lest I should put my foot on a scorpion or a dangerous snake. At this moment something suddenly calling my attention to the outside, I looked across, and then, with a start, sprang up, for I could not contain myself. I don't know what I said, but enough to startle the people in the room, one of whom was old Mr. Pitmilly. They all looked round upon me to ask what

was the matter. And when I gave my usual answer of "Nothing," sitting down again shamefaced but very much excited, Mr. Pitmilly got up and came forward, and looked out, apparently to see what was the cause. He saw nothing, for he went back again, and I could hear him telling Aunt Mary not to be alarmed, for Missy had fallen into a doze with the heat, and had startled herself waking up, at which they all laughed: another time I could have killed him for his impertinence, but my mind was too much taken up now to pay any attention. My head was throbbing and my heart beating. I was in such high excitement, however, that to restrain myself completely, to be perfectly silent, was more easy to me then than at any other time of my life. I waited until the old gentleman had taken his seat again, and then I looked back. Yes, there he was! I had not been deceived. I knew then, when I looked across, that this was what I had been looking for all the time—that I had known he was there, and had been waiting for him, every time there was that flicker of movement in the room—him and no one else. And there at last, just as I had expected, he was. I don't know that in reality I ever had expected him, or any one: but this was what I felt when, suddenly looking into that curious dim room, I saw him there.

He was sitting in the chair, which he must have placed for himself, or which some one else in the dead of night when nobody was looking must have set for him, in front of the escritoire—with the back of his head towards me, writing. The light fell upon him from the left hand, and therefore upon his shoulders and the side of his head, which, however, was too much turned away to show anything of his face. Oh, how strange that there should be some one staring at him as I was doing, and he never to turn his head, to make a movement! If any one stood and looked at me, were I in the soundest sleep that ever was, I would wake, I would jump up, I would feel it through everything. But there he sat and never moved. You are not to suppose, though I said the light fell upon him from the left hand, that there was very much light. There never is in a room you are looking into like that across the street; but there was enough to see him by—the outline of his figure dark and solid, seated in the chair, and the fairness of his head visible faintly, a clear spot against the dimness. I saw this outline against the dim gilding of the frame of the large picture which hung on the farther wall.

I sat all the time the visitors were there, in a sort of rapture, gazing at this figure. I knew no reason why I should be so much

moved. In an ordinary way, to see a student at an opposite window quietly doing his work might have interested me a little, but certainly it would not have moved me in any such way. It is always interesting to have a glimpse like this of an unknown life—to see so much and yet know so little, and to wonder, perhaps, what the man is doing, and why he never turns his head. One would go to the window—but not too close, lest he should see you and think you were spying upon him—and one would ask, Is he still there? is he writing, writing always? I wonder what he is writing! And it would be a great amusement: but no more. This was not my feeling at all in the present case. It was a sort of breathless watch, an absorption. I did not feel that I had eyes for anything else, or any room in my mind for another thought. I no longer heard, as I generally did, the stories and the wise remarks (or foolish) of Aunt Mary's old ladies or Mr. Pitmilly. I heard only a murmur behind me, the interchange of voices, one softer, one sharper; but it was not as in the time when I sat reading and heard every word, till the story in my book and the stories they were telling (what they said almost always shaped into stories), were all mingled into each other, and the hero in the novel became somehow the hero (or more likely heroine) of them all. But I took no notice of what they were saying now. And it was not that there was anything very interesting to look at, except the fact that he was there. He did nothing to keep up the absorption of my thoughts. He moved just so much as a man will do when he is very busily writing, thinking of nothing else. There was a faint turn of his head as he went from one side to another of the page he was writing; but it appeared to be a long long page which never wanted turning. Just a little inclination when he was at the end of the line, outward, and then a little inclination inward when he began the next. That was little enough to keep one gazing. But I suppose it was the gradual course of events leading up to this, the finding out of one thing after another as the eyes got accustomed to the vague light: first the room itself, and then the writing-table, and then the other furniture, and last of all the human inhabitant who gave it all meaning. This was all so interesting that it was like a country which one had discovered. And then the extraordinary blindness of the other people who disputed among themselves whether it was a window at all! I did not, I am sure, wish to be disrespectful, and I was very fond of my Aunt Mary, and I liked Mr. Pitmilly well enough, and I was afraid of Lady Carnbee. But yet to think of the—I know I ought not to say

stupidity—the blindness of them, the foolishness, the insensibility! discussing it as if a thing that your eyes could see was a thing to discuss! It would have been unkind to think it was because they were old and their faculties dimmed. It is so sad to think that the faculties grow dim, that such a woman as my Aunt Mary should fail in seeing, or hearing, or feeling, that I would not have dwelt on it for a moment, it would have seemed so cruel! And then such a clever old lady as Lady Carnbee, who could see through a millstone, people said—and Mr. Pitmilly, such an old man of the world. It did indeed bring tears to my eyes to think that all those clever people, solely by reason of being no longer young as I was, should have the simplest things shut out from them; and for all their wisdom and their knowledge be unable to see what a girl like me could see so easily. I was too much grieved for them to dwell upon that thought, and half ashamed, though perhaps half proud too, to be so much better off than they.

All those thoughts flitted through my mind as I sat and gazed across the street. And I felt there was so much going on in that room across the street! He was so absorbed in his writing, never looked up, never paused for a word, never turned round in his chair, or got up and walked about the room as my father did. Papa is a great writer, everybody says: but he would have come to the window and looked out, he would have drummed with his fingers on the pane, he would have watched a fly and helped it over a difficulty, and played with the fringe of the curtain, and done a dozen other nice, pleasant, foolish things, till the next sentence took shape. "My dear, I am waiting for a word," he would say to my mother when she looked at him, with a question why he was so idle, in her eyes; and then he would laugh, and go back again to his writing-table. But He over there never stopped at all. It was like a fascination. I could not take my eyes from him and that little scarcely perceptible movement he made, turning his head. I trembled with impatience to see him turn the page, or perhaps throw down his finished sheet on the floor, as somebody looking into a window like me once saw Sir Walter do, sheet after sheet. I should have cried out if this Unknown had done that. I should not have been able to help myself, whoever had been present; and gradually I got into such a state of suspense waiting for it to be done that my head grew hot and my hands cold. And then, just when there was a little movement of his elbow, as if he were about to do this, to be called away by Aunt Mary to see Lady Carnbee to the door! I believe I did not hear her till she had

called me three times, and then I stumbled up, all flushed and hot, and nearly crying. When I came out from the recess to give the old lady my arm (Mr. Pitmilly had gone away some time before), she put up her hand and stroked my cheek. "What ails the bairn?" she said; "she's fevered. You must not let her sit her lane in the window, Mary Balcarres. You and me know what comes of that." Her old fingers had a strange touch, cold like something not living, and I felt that dreadful diamond sting me on the cheek.

I do not say that this was not just a part of my excitement and suspense; and I know it is enough to make any one laugh when the excitement was all about an unknown man writing in a room on the other side of the way, and my impatience because he never came to an end of the page. If you think I was not quite as well aware of this as any one could be! but the worst was that this dreadful old lady felt my heart beating against her arm that was within mine. "You are just in a dream," she said to me, with her old voice close at my ear as we went downstairs. "I don't know who it is about, but it's bound to be some man that is not worth it. If you were wise you would think of him no more."

"I am thinking of no man!" I said, half crying. "It is very unkind and dreadful of you to say so, Lady Carnbee. I never thought of——any man, in all my life!" I cried in a passion of indignation. The old lady clung tighter to my arm, and pressed it to her, not unkindly.

"Poor little bird," she said, "how it's strugglin' and flutterin'! I'm not saying but what it's more dangerous when it's all for a dream."

She was not at all unkind; but I was very angry and excited, and would scarcely shake that old pale hand which she put out to me from her carriage window when I had helped her in. I was angry with her, and I was afraid of the diamond, which looked up from under her finger as if it saw through and through me; and whether you believe me or not, I am certain that it stung me again—a sharp malignant prick, oh full of meaning! She never wore gloves, but only black lace mittens, through which that horrible diamond gleamed. I ran upstairs—she had been the last to go—and Aunt Mary too had gone to get ready for dinner, for it was late. I hurried to my place, and looked across, with my heart beating more than ever. I made quite sure I should see the finished sheet lying white upon the floor. But what I gazed at was only the dim blank of that window which they said was no

window. The light had changed in some wonderful way during that five minutes I had been gone, and there was nothing, nothing, not a reflection, not a glimmer. It looked exactly as they all said, the blank form of a window painted on the wall. It was too much: I sat down in my excitement and cried as if my heart would break. I felt that they had done something to it, that it was not natural, that I could not bear their unkindness—even Aunt Mary. They thought it not good for me! not good for me! and they had done something—even Aunt Mary herself—and that wicked diamond that hid itself in Lady Carnbee's hand. Of course I knew all this was ridiculous as well as you could tell me; but I was exasperated by the disappointment and the sudden stop to all my excited feelings, and I could not bear it. It was more strong than I.

I was late for dinner, and naturally there were some traces in my eyes that I had been crying when I came into the full light in the dining-room, where Aunt Mary could look at me at her pleasure, and I could not run away. She said, "Honey, you have been shedding tears. I'm loth, loth that a bairn of your mother's should be made to shed tears in my house."

"I have not been made to shed tears," cried I; and then, to save myself another fit of crying, I burst out laughing and said, "I am afraid of that dreadful diamond on old Lady Carnbee's hand. It bites—I am sure it bites! Aunt Mary, look here."

"You foolish lassie," Aunt Mary said; but she looked at my cheek under the light of the lamp, and then she gave it a little pat with her soft hand. "Go away with you, you silly bairn. There is no bite; but a flushed cheek, my honey, and a wet eye. You must just read out my paper to me after dinner when the post is in: and we'll have no more thinking and no more dreaming for to-night."

"Yes, Aunt Mary," said I. But I knew what would happen; for when she opens up her *Times,* all full of the news of the world, and the speeches and things which she takes an interest in, though I cannot tell why—she forgets. And as I kept very quiet and made not a sound, she forgot to-night what she had said, and the curtain hung a little more over me than usual, and I sat down in my recess as if I had been a hundred miles away. And my heart gave a great jump, as if it would have come out of my breast; for he was there. But not as he had been in the morning—I suppose the light, perhaps, was not good enough to go on with his work without a lamp or candles—for he had turned away from the table

and was fronting the window, sitting leaning back in his chair, and turning his head to me. Not to me—he knew nothing about me. I thought he was not looking at anything; but with his face turned my way, My heart was in my mouth: it was so unexpected, so strange! though why it should have seemed strange I know not, for there was no communication between him and me that it should have moved me; and what could be more natural than that a man, wearied of his work, and feeling the want perhaps of more light, and yet that it was not dark enough to light a lamp, should turn round in his own chair, and rest a little, and think—perhaps of nothing at all? Papa always says he is thinking of nothing at all. He says things blow through his mind as if the doors were open, and he has no responsibility. What sort of things were blowing through this man's mind? or was he thinking, still thinking, of what he had been writing and going on with it still? The thing that troubled me most was that I could not make out his face. It is very difficult to do so when you see a person only through two windows, your own and his. I wanted very much to recognise him afterwards if I should chance to meet him in the street. If he had only stood up and moved about the room, I should have made out the rest of his figure, and then I should have known him again; or if he had only come to the window (as papa always did), then I should have seen his face clearly enough to have recognised him. But, to be sure, he did not see any need to do anything in order that I might recognise him, for he did not know I existed; and probably if he had known I was watching him, he would have been annoyed and gone away.

But he was as immovable there facing the window as he had been seated at the desk. Sometimes he made a little faint stir with a hand or a foot, and I held my breath, hoping he was about to rise from his chair—but he never did it. And with all the efforts I made I could not be sure of his face. I puckered my eyelids together as old Miss Jeanie did who was shortsighted, and I put my hands on each side of my face to concentrate the light on him: but it was all in vain. Either the face changed as I sat staring, or else it was the light that was not good enough, or I don't know what it was. His hair seemed to me light—certainly there was no dark line about his head, as there would have been had it been very dark—and I saw, where it came across the old gilt frame on the wall behind, that it must be fair: and I am almost sure he had no beard. Indeed I am sure that he had no beard, for the outline of his face was distinct enough; and the daylight was

still quite clear out of doors, so that I recognised perfectly a baker's boy who was on the pavement opposite, and whom I should have known again whenever I had met him: as if it was of the least importance to recognise a baker's boy! There was one thing, however, rather curious about this boy. He had been throwing stones at something or somebody. In St. Rule's they have a great way of throwing stones at each other, and I suppose there had been a battle. I suppose also that he had one stone in his hand left over from the battle, and his roving eye took in all the incidents of the street to judge where he could throw it with most effect and mischief. But apparently he found nothing worthy of it in the street, for he suddenly turned round with a flick under his leg to show his cleverness and aimed it straight at the window. I remarked without remarking that it struck with a hard sound and without any breaking of glass, and fell straight down on the pavement. But I took no notice of this even in my mind, so intently was I watching the figure within, which moved not nor took the slightest notice, and remained just as dimly clear, as perfectly seen, yet as undistinguishable, as before. And then the light began to fail a little, not diminishing the prospect within, but making it still less distinct than it had been.

Then I jumped up, feeling Aunt Mary's hand upon my shoulder. "Honey," she said, "I asked you twice to ring the bell; but you did not hear me."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!" I cried in great penitence, but turning again to the window in spite of myself.

"You must come away from there: you must come away from there," she said, almost as if she were angry: and then her soft voice grew softer, and she gave me a kiss: "never mind about the lamp, honey; I have rung myself, and it is coming; but, silly bairn, you must not aye be dreaming—your little head will turn."

All the answer I made, for I could scarcely speak, was to give a little wave with my hand to the window on the other side of the street.

She stood there patting me softly on the shoulder for a whole minute or more, murmuring something that sounded like, "She must go away, she must go away." Then she said, always with her hand soft on my shoulder, "Like a dream when one awaketh." And when I looked again, I saw the blank of an opaque surface and nothing more.

Aunt Mary asked me no more questions. She made me come into the room and sit in the light and read something to her.

But I did not know what I was reading, for there suddenly came into my mind and took possession of it, the thud of the stone upon the window, and its descent straight down, as if from some hard substance that threw it off: though I had myself seen it strike upon the glass of the panes across the way.

IV

I am afraid I continued in a state of great exaltation and commotion of mind for some time. I used to hurry through the day till the evening came, when I could watch my neighbour through the window opposite. I did not talk much to any one, and I never said a word about my own questions and wonderings. I wondered who he was, what he was doing, and why he never came till the evening (or very rarely); and I also wondered much to what house the room belonged in which he sat. It seemed to form a portion of the old College Library, as I have often said. The window was one of the line of windows which I understood lighted the large hall; but whether this room belonged to the library itself, or how its occupant gained access to it, I could not tell. I made up my mind that it must open out of the hall, and that the gentleman must be the Librarian or one of his assistants, perhaps kept busy all the day in his official duties, and only able to get to his desk and do his own private work in the evening. One had heard of so many things like that—a man who had to take up some other kind of work for his living, and then when his leisure-time came, gave it all up to something he really loved —some study or some book he was writing. My father himself at one time had been like that. He had been in the Treasury all day, and then in the evening wrote his books, which made him famous. His daughter, however little she might know of other things, could not but know that! But it discouraged me very much when somebody pointed out to me one day in the street an old gentleman who wore a wig and took a great deal of snuff, and said, That's the Librarian of the old College. It gave me a great shock for a moment; but then I remembered that an old gentleman has generally assistants, and that it must be one of them.

Gradually I became quite sure of this. There was another small window above, which twinkled very much when the sun shone, and looked a very kindly bright little window, above that dullness of the other which hid so much. I made up my mind this

was the window of his other room, and that these two chambers at the end of the beautiful hall were really beautiful for him to live in, so near all the books, and so retired and quiet, that nobody knew of them. What a fine thing for him! and you could see what use he made of his good fortune as he sat there, so constant at his writing for hours together. Was it a book he was writing, or could it be perhaps Poems? This was a thought which made my heart beat; but I concluded with much regret that it could not be Poems, because no one could possibly write Poems like that, straight off, without pausing for a word or a rhyme. Had they been Poems he must have risen up, he must have paced about the room or come to the window as papa did—not that papa wrote Poems: he always said, "I am not worthy even to speak of such prevailing mysteries," shaking his head—which gave me a wonderful admiration and almost awe of a Poet, who was thus much greater even than papa. But I could not believe that a poet could have kept still for hours and hours like that. What could it be then? perhaps it was history; that is a great thing to work at, but you would not perhaps need to move nor to stride up and down, or look out upon the sky and the wonderful light.

He did move now and then, however, though he never came to the window. Sometimes, as I have said, he would turn round in his chair and turn his face towards it, and sit there for a long time musing when the light had begun to fail, and the world was full of that strange day which was night, that light without colour, in which everything was so clearly visible, and there were no shadows. "It was between the night and the day, when the fairy folk have power." This was the after-light of the wonderful, long, long summer evening, the light without shadows. It had a spell in it, and sometimes it made me afraid: and all manner of strange thoughts seemed to come in, and I always felt that if only we had a little more vision in our eyes we might see beautiful folk walking about in it, who were not of our world. I thought most likely he saw them, from the way he sat there looking out: and this made my heart expand with the most curious sensation, as if of pride that, though I could not see, he did, and did not even require to come to the window, as I did, sitting close in the depth of the recess, with my eyes upon him, and almost seeing things through his eyes.

I was so much absorbed in these thoughts and in watching him every evening—for now he never missed an evening, but was

always there—that people began to remark that I was looking pale and that I could not be well, for I paid no attention when they talked to me, and did not care to go out, nor to join the other girls for their tennis, nor to do anything that others did; and some said to Aunt Mary that I was quickly losing all the ground I had gained, and that she could never send me back to my mother with a white face like that. Aunt Mary had begun to look at me anxiously for some time before that, and, I am sure, held secret consultations over me, sometimes with the doctor, and sometimes with her old ladies, who thought they knew more about young girls than even the doctors. And I could hear them saying to her that I wanted diversion, that I must be diverted, and that she must take me out more, and give a party, and that when the summer visitors began to come there would perhaps be a ball or two, or Lady Carnbee would get up a picnic. "And there's my young lord coming home," said the old lady whom they called Miss Jeanie, "and I never knew the young lassie yet that would not cock up her bonnet at the sight of a young lord."

But Aunt Mary shook her head. "I would not lippen much to the young lord," she said. "His mother is sore set upon siller for him; and my poor bit honey has no fortune to speak of. No, we must not fly so high as the young lord; but I will gladly take her about the country to see the old castles and towers. It will perhaps rouse her up a little."

"And if that does not answer we must think of something else," the old lady said.

I heard them perhaps that day because they were talking of me, which is always so effective a way of making you hear—for latterly I had not been paying any attention to what they were saying; and I thought to myself how little they knew, and how little I cared about even the old castles and curious houses, having something else in my mind. But just about that time Mr. Pitmilly came in, who was always a friend to me, and, when he heard them talking, he managed to stop them and turn the conversation into another channel. And after a while, when the ladies were gone away, he came up to my recess, and gave a glance right over my head. And then he asked my Aunt Mary if ever she had settled her question about the window opposite "that you thought was a window sometimes, and then not a window, and many curious things," the old gentleman said.

My Aunt Mary gave me another very wistful look; and then

she said, "Indeed, Mr. Pitmilly, we are just where we were, and I am quite as unsettled as ever; and I think my niece she has taken up my views, for I see her many a time looking across and wondering, and I am not clear now what her opinion is."

"My opinion!" I said, "Aunt Mary." I could not help being a little scornful, as one is when one is very young. "I have no opinion. There is not only a window but there is a room, and I could show you——" I was going to say, "show you the gentleman who sits and writes in it," but I stopped, not knowing what they might say, and looked from one to another. "I could tell you —all the furniture that is in it," I said. And then I felt something like a flame that went over my face, and that all at once my cheeks were burning. I thought they gave a little glance at each other, but that may have been folly. "There is a great picture, in a big dim frame," I said, feeling a little breathless, "on the wall opposite the window——"

"Is there so?" said Mr. Pitmilly, with a little laugh. And he said, "Now I will tell you what we'll do. You know that there is a conversation party, or whatever they call it, in the big room to-night, and it will be all open and lighted up. And it is a handsome room, and two-three things well worth looking at. I will just step along after we have all got our dinner, and take you over to the pairty, madam—Missy and you——"

"Dear me!" said Aunt Mary. "I have not gone to a pairty for more years than I would like to say—and never once to the Library Hall." Then she gave a little shiver, and said quite low, "I could not go there."

"Then you will just begin again to-night, madam," said Mr. Pitmilly, taking no notice of this, "and a proud man will I be leading in Mistress Balcarres that was once the pride of the ball."

"Ah, once!" said Aunt Mary, with a low little laugh and then a sigh. "And we'll not say how long ago"; and after that she made a pause, looking always at me; and then she said, "I accept your offer, and we'll put on our braws; and I hope you will have no occasion to think shame of us. But why not take your dinner here?"

That was how it was settled, and the old gentleman went away to dress, looking quite pleased. But I came to Aunt Mary as soon as he was gone, and besought her not to make me go. "I like the long bonnie night and the light that lasts so long. And I cannot bear to dress up and go out, wasting it all in a

stupid party. I hate parties, Aunt Mary!" I cried, "and I would far rather stay here."

"My honey," she said, taking both my hands, "I know it will maybe be a blow to you,—but it's better so."

"How could it be a blow to me?" I cried; "but I would far rather not go."

"You'll just go with me, honey, just this once: it is not often I go out. You will go with me this one night, just this one night, my honey sweet."

I am sure there were tears in Aunt Mary's eyes, and she kissed me between the words. There was nothing more that I could say; but how I grudged the evening! A mere party, a conversazione (when all the College was away, too, and nobody to make conversation!), instead of my enchanted hour at my window and the soft strange light, and the dim face looking out, which kept me wondering and wondering what was he thinking of, what was he looking for, who was he? all one wonder and mystery and question, through the long, long slowly fading night!

It occurred to me, however, when I was dressing—though I was so sure that he would prefer his solitude to everything—that he might perhaps, it was just possible, be there. And when I thought of that, I took out my white frock—though Janet had laid out my blue one—and my little pearl necklace which I had thought was too good to wear. They were not very large pearls, but they were real pearls, and very even and lustrous though they were small; and though I did not think much of my appearance then, there must have been something about me—pale as I was but apt to colour in a moment, with my dress so white, and my pearls so white, and my hair all shadowy—perhaps, that was pleasant to look at: for even old Mr. Pitmilly had a strange look in his eyes, as if he was not only pleased but sorry too, perhaps thinking me a creature that would have troubles in this life, though I was so young and knew them not. And when Aunt Mary looked at me, there was a little quiver about her mouth. She herself had on her pretty lace and her white hair very nicely done, and looking her best. As for Mr. Pitmilly, he had a beautiful fine French cambric frill to his shirt, plaited in the most minute plaits, and with a diamond pin in it which sparkled as much as Lady Carnbee's ring; but this was a fine frank kindly stone, that looked you straight in the face and sparkled, with the light dancing in it as if it were pleased to see you, and to be shining on that old gentleman's honest and faithful breast: for

he had been one of Aunt Mary's lovers in their early days, and still thought there was nobody like her in the world.

I had got into quite a happy commotion of mind by the time we set out across the street in the soft light of the evening to the Library Hall. Perhaps, after all, I should see him, and see the room which I was so well acquainted with, and find out why he sat there so constantly and never was seen abroad. I thought I might even hear what he was working at, which would be such a pleasant thing to tell papa when I went home. A friend of mine at St. Rule's—oh, far, far more busy than you ever were, papa!—and then my father would laugh as he always did, and say he was but an idler and never busy at all.

The room was all light and bright, flowers wherever flowers could be, and the long lines of the books that went along the walls on each side, lighting up wherever there was a line of gilding or an ornament, with a little response. It dazzled me at first all that light: but I was very eager, though I kept very quiet, looking round to see if perhaps in any corner, in the middle of any group, he would be there. I did not expect to see him among the ladies. He would not be with them—he was too studious, too silent: but perhaps among that circle of grey heads at the upper end of the room—perhaps——

No: I am not sure that it was not half a pleasure to me to make quite sure that there was not one whom I could take for him, who was at all like my vague image of him. No: it was absurd to think that he would be here, amid all that sound of voices, under the glare of that light. I felt a little proud to think that he was in his room as usual, doing his work, or thinking so deeply over it, as when he turned round in his chair with his face to the light.

I was thus getting a little composed and quiet in my mind, for now that the expectation of seeing him was over, though it was a disappointment, it was a satisfaction too—when Mr. Pitmilly came up to me, holding out his arm. "Now," he said, "I am going to take you to see the curiosities." I thought to myself that after I had seen them and spoken to everybody I knew, Aunt Mary would let me go home, so I went very willingly, though I did not care for the curiosities. Something, however, struck me strangely as we walked up the room. It was the air, rather fresh and strong, from an open window at the east end of the hall. How should there be a window there? I hardly saw what it meant for the

first moment, but it blew in my face as if there was some meaning in it, and I felt very uneasy without seeing why.

Then there was another thing that startled me. On that side of the wall which was to the street there seemed no windows at all. A long line of bookcases filled it from end to end. I could not see what that meant either, but it confused me. I was altogether confused. I felt as if I was in a strange country, not knowing where I was going, not knowing what I might find out next. If there were no windows on the wall to the street, where was my window? My heart, which had been jumping up and calming down again all the time, gave a great leap at this, as if it would have come out of me—but I did not know what it could mean.

Then we stopped before a glass case, and Mr. Pitmilly showed me some things in it. I could not pay much attention to them. My head was going round and round. I heard his voice going on, and then myself speaking with a queer sound that was hollow in my ears; but I did not know what I was saying or what he was saying. Then he took me to the very end of the room, the east end, saying something that I caught—that I was pale, that the air would do me good. The air was blowing full on me, lifting the lace of my dress, lifting my hair, almost chilly. The window opened into the pale daylight, into the little lane that ran by the end of the building. Mr. Pitmilly went on talking, but I could not make out a word he said. Then I heard my own voice speaking through it, though I did not seem to be aware that I was speaking. "Where is my window?—where, then, is my window?" I seemed to be saying, and I turned right round, dragging him with me, still holding his arm. As I did this my eyes fell upon something at last which I knew. It was a large picture in a broad frame, hanging against the farther wall.

What did it mean? Oh, what did it mean? I turned round again to the open window at the east end, and to the daylight, the strange light without any shadow, that was all round about this lighted hall, holding it like a bubble that would burst, like something that was not real. The real place was the room I knew, in which that picture was hanging, where the writing-table was, and where he sat with his face to the light. But where was the light and the window through which it came? I think my senses must have left me. I went up to the picture which I knew, and then I walked straight across the room, always dragging Mr. Pitmilly, whose face was pale, but who did not struggle but allowed

me to lead him, straight across to where the window was—where the window was not;—where there was no sign of it. "Where is my window?—where is my window?" I said. And all the time I was sure that I was in a dream, and these lights were all some theatrical illusion, and the people talking; and nothing real but the pale, pale, watching, lingering day standing by to wait until that foolish bubble should burst.

"My dear," said Mr. Pitmilly, "my dear! Mind that you are in public. Mind where you are. You must not make an outcry and frighten your Aunt Mary. Come away with me. Come away, my dear young lady! and you'll take a seat for a minute or two and compose yourself; and I'll get you an ice or a little wine." He kept patting my hand, which was on his arm, and looking at me very anxiously. "Bless me! bless me! I never thought it would have this effect," he said.

But I would not allow him to take me away in that direction. I went to the picture again and looked at it without seeing it: and then I went across the room again, with some kind of wild thought that if I insisted I should find it. "My window—my window!" I said.

There was one of the professors standing there, and he heard me. "The window!" said he. "Ah, you've been taken in with what appears outside. It was put there to be in uniformity with the window on the stair. But it never was a real window. It is just behind that bookcase. Many people are taken in by it," he said.

His voice seemed to sound from somewhere far away, and as if it would go on for ever; and the hall swam in a dazzle of shining and of noises round me; and the daylight through the open window grew greyer, waiting till it should be over, and the bubble burst.

V

It was Mr. Pitmilly who took me home; or rather it was I who took him, pushing him on a little in front of me, holding fast by his arm, not waiting for Aunt Mary or any one. We came out into the daylight again outside, I, without even a cloak or a shawl, with my bare arms, and uncovered head, and the pearls round my neck. There was a rush of the people about, and a baker's boy, that baker's boy, stood right in my way and cried, "Here's a braw ane!" shouting to the others: the words struck me some-

how, as his stone had struck the window, without any reason. But I did not mind the people staring, and hurried across the street, with Mr. Pitmilly half a step in advance. The door was open, and Janet standing at it, looking out to see what she could see of the ladies in their grand dresses. She gave a shriek when she saw me hurrying across the street; but I brushed past her, and pushed Mr. Pitmilly up the stairs, and took him breathless to the recess, where I threw myself down on the seat, feeling as if I could not have gone another step farther, and waved my hand across to the window. "There! there!" I cried. Ah! there it was—not that senseless mob—not the theatre and the gas, and the people all in a murmur and clang of talking. Never in all these days had I seen that room so clearly. There was a faint tone of light behind, as if it might have been a reflection from some of those vulgar lights in the hall, and he sat against it, calm, wrapped in his thoughts, with his face turned to the window. Nobody but must have seen him. Janet could have seen him had I called her upstairs. It was like a picture, all the things I knew, and the same attitude, and the atmosphere, full of quietness, not disturbed by anything. I pulled Mr. Pitmilly's arm before I let him go,—"You see, you see!" I cried. He gave me the most bewildered look, as if he would have liked to cry. He saw nothing! I was sure of that from his eyes. He was an old man, and there was no vision in him. If I had called up Janet, she would have seen it all. "My dear!" he said. "My dear!" waving his hands in a helpless way.

"He has been there all these nights," I cried, "and I thought you could tell me who he was and what he was doing; and that he might have taken me in to that room and showed me, that I might tell papa. Papa would understand, he would like to hear. Oh, can't you tell me what work he is doing, Mr. Pitmilly? He never lifts his head as long as the light throws a shadow, and then when it is like this he turns round and thinks, and takes a rest!"

Mr. Pitmilly was trembling, whether it was with cold or I know not what. He said, with a shake in his voice, "My dear young lady—my dear——" and then stopped and looked at me as if he were going to cry. "It's peetiful, it's peetiful," he said; and then in another voice, "I am going across there again to bring your Aunt Mary home; do you understand, my poor little thing, my—— I am going to bring her home—you will be better when she is here." I was glad when he went away, as he could

not see anything: and I sat alone in the dark which was not dark, but quite clear light—a light like nothing I ever saw. How clear it was in that room! not glaring like the gas and the voices, but so quiet, everything so visible, as if it were in another world. I heard a little rustle behind me, and there was Janet, standing staring at me with two big eyes wide open. She was only a little older than I was. I called to her, "Janet, come here, come here, and you will see him—come here and see him!" impatient that she should be so shy and keep behind. "Oh, my bonnie young leddy!" she said, and burst out crying. I stamped my foot at her, in my indignation that she would not come, and she fled before me with a rustle and swing of haste, as if she were afraid. None of them, none of them! not even a girl like myself, with the sight in her eyes, would understand. I turned back again, and held out my hands to him sitting there, who was the only one that knew. "Oh," I said, "say something to me! I don't know who you are, or what you are: but you're lonely and so am I; and I only—feel for you. Say something to me!" I neither hoped that he would hear, nor expected any answer. How could he hear, with the street between us, and his window shut, and all the murmuring of the voices and the people standing about? But for one moment it seemed to me that there was only him and me in the whole world.

But I gasped with my breath, that had almost gone from me, when I saw him move in his chair! He had heard me, though I knew not how. He rose up, and I rose too, speechless, incapable of anything but this mechanical movement. He seemed to draw me as if I were a puppet moved by his will. He came forward to the window, and stood looking across at me. I was sure that he looked at me. At last he had seen me: at last he had found out that somebody, though only a girl, was watching him, looking for him, believing in him. I was in such trouble and commotion of mind and trembling, that I could not keep on my feet, but dropped kneeling on the window-seat, supporting myself against the window, feeling as if my heart were being drawn out of me. I cannot describe his face. It was all dim, yet there was a light on it: I think it must have been a smile; and as closely as I looked at him he looked at me. His hair was fair, and there was a little quiver about his lips. Then he put his hands upon the window to open it. It was stiff and hard to move; but at last he forced it open with a sound that echoed all along the street. I saw that the people heard it, and several looked up.

As for me, I put my hands together, leaning with my face against the glass, drawn to him as if I could have gone out of myself, my heart out of my bosom, my eyes out of my head. He opened the window with a noise that was heard from the West Port to the Abbey. Could any one doubt that?

And then he leaned forward out of the window, looking out. There was not one in the street but must have seen him. He looked at me first, with a little wave of his hand, as if it were a salutation—yet not exactly that either, for I thought he waved me away; and then he looked up and down in the dim shining of the ending day, first to the east, to the old Abbey towers, and then to the west, along the broad line of the street where so many people were coming and going, but so little noise, all like enchanted folk in an enchanted place. I watched him with such a melting heart, with such a deep satisfaction as words could not say; for nobody could tell me now that he was not there,—nobody could say I was dreaming any more. I watched him as if I could not breathe—my heart in my throat, my eyes upon him. He looked up and down, and then he looked back to me. I was the first, and I was the last, though it was not for long: he did know, he did see, who it was that had recognised him and sympathised with him all the time. I was in a kind of rapture, yet stupor too; my look went with his look, following it as if I were his shadow; and then suddenly he was gone, and I saw him no more.

I dropped back again upon my seat, seeking something to support me, something to lean upon. He had lifted his hand and waved it once again to me. How he went I cannot tell, nor where he went I cannot tell; but in a moment he was away, and the windows standing open, and the room fading into stillness and dimness, yet so clear, with all its space, and the great picture in its gilded frame upon the wall. It gave me no pain to see him go away. My heart was so content, and I was so worn out and satisfied—for what doubt or question could there be about him now? As I was lying back as weak as water, Aunt Mary came in behind me and flew to me with a little rustle as if she had come on wings, and put her arms round me, and drew my head on to her breast. I had begun to cry a little, with sobs like a child. "You saw him, you saw him!" I said. To lean upon her, and feel her so soft, so kind, gave me a pleasure I cannot describe, and her arms round me, and her voice saying "Honey, my honey!"—as if she were nearly crying too. Lying there I came

back to myself, quite sweetly, glad of everything. But I wanted some assurance from them that they had seen him too. I waved my hand to the window that was still standing open, and the room that was stealing away into the faint dark. "This time you saw it all!" I said, getting more eager. "My honey!" said Aunt Mary, giving me a kiss: and Mr. Pitmilly began to walk about the room with short little steps behind, as if he were out of patience. I sat straight up and put away Aunt Mary's arms. "You cannot be so blind, so blind!" I cried. "Oh, not to-night, at least not to-night!" But neither the one nor the other made any reply. I shook myself quite free, and raised myself up. And there, in the middle of the street, stood the baker's boy like a statue, staring up at the open window, with his mouth open and his face full of wonder—breathless, as if he could not believe what he saw. I darted forward, calling to him, and beckoned him to come to me. "Oh, bring him up; bring him, bring him to me!" I cried.

Mr. Pitmilly went out directly, and got the boy by the shoulder. He did not want to come. It was strange to see the little old gentleman, with his beautiful frill and his diamond pin, standing out in the street, with his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and the other boys round, all in a little crowd. And presently they came towards the house, the others all following, gaping and wondering. He came in unwilling, almost resisting, looking as if we meant him some harm. "Come away, my laddie, come and speak to the young lady," Mr. Pitmilly was saying. And Aunt Mary took my hands to keep me back. But I would not be kept back.

"Boy," I cried, "you saw it too: you saw it: tell them you saw it! It is that I want, and no more."

He looked at me as they all did, as if he thought I was mad. "What's she wantin' wi' me?" he said; and then, "I did nae harm, even if I did throw a bit stane at it—and it's nae sin to throw a stane."

"You rascal!" said Mr. Pitmilly, giving him a shake; "have you been throwing stones? You'll kill somebody some of these days with your stones." The old gentleman was confused and troubled, for he did not understand what I wanted, nor anything that had happened. And then Aunt Mary, holding my hands and drawing me close to her, spoke. "Laddie," she said, "answer the young lady, like a good lad. There's no intention of finding fault with you. Answer her, my man, and then Janet will give ye your supper before you go."

"Oh speak, speak!" I cried; "answer them and tell them! you saw that window opened, and the gentleman look out and wave his hand?"

"I saw nae gentleman," he said, with his head down, "except this wee gentleman here."

"Listen, laddie," said Aunt Mary. "I saw ye standing in the middle of the street staring. What were ye looking at?"

"It was naething to make a wark about. It was just yon windy yonder in the library that is nae windy. And it was open—as sure's death. You may laugh if you like. Is that a' she's wantin' wi' me?"

"You are telling a pack of lies, laddie," Mr. Pitmilly said.

"I'm tellin' nae lees—it was standin' open just like ony ither windy. It's as sure's death. I couldna believe it mysel'; but it's true."

"And there it is," I cried, turning round and pointing it out to them with great triumph in my heart. But the light was all grey, it had faded, it had changed. The window was just as it had always been, a sombre break upon the wall.

I was treated like an invalid all that evening, and taken upstairs to bed, and Aunt Mary sat up in my room the whole night through. Whenever I opened my eyes she was always sitting there close to me, watching. And there never was in all my life so strange a night. When I would talk in my excitement, she kissed me and hushed me like a child. "Oh, honey, you are not the only one!" she said. "Oh whisht, whisht, bairn! I should never have let you be there!"

"Aunt Mary, Aunt Mary, you have seen him too?"

"Oh whisht, whisht, honey!" Aunt Mary said: her eyes were shining—there were tears in them. "Oh whisht, whisht! Put it out of your mind, and try to sleep. I will not speak another word," she cried.

But I had my arms round her, and my mouth at her ear. "Who is he there?—tell me that and I will ask no more——"

"Oh honey, rest, and try to sleep! It is just—how can I tell you?—a dream, a dream! Did you not hear what Lady Carnbee said?—the women of our blood——"

"What? what? Aunt Mary, oh Aunt Mary——"

"I canna tell you," she cried in her agitation, "I canna tell you! How can I tell you, when I know just what you know and no more? It is a longing all your life after—it is a looking—for what never comes."

"He will come," I cried. "I shall see him to-morrow—that I know, I know!"

She kissed me and cried over me, her cheek hot and wet like mine. "My honey, try if you can sleep—try if you can sleep: and we'll wait to see what to-morrow brings."

"I have no fear," said I; and then I suppose, though it is strange to think of, I must have fallen asleep—I was so worn-out, and young, and not used to lying in my bed awake. From time to time I opened my eyes, and sometimes jumped up remembering everything; but Aunt Mary was always there to soothe me, and I lay down again in her shelter like a bird in its nest.

But I would not let them keep me in bed next day. I was in a kind of fever, not knowing what I did. The window was quite opaque, without the least glimmer in it, flat and blank like a piece of wood. Never from the first day had I seen it so little like a window. "It cannot be wondered at," I said to myself, "that seeing it like that, and with eyes that are old, not so clear as mine, they should think what they do." And then I smiled to myself to think of the evening and the long light, and whether he would look out again, or only give me a signal with his hand. I decided I would like that best: not that he should take the trouble to come forward and open it again, but just a turn of his head and a wave of his hand. It would be more friendly and show more confidence—not as if I wanted that kind of demonstration every night.

I did not come down in the afternoon, but kept at my own window upstairs alone, till the tea-party should be over. I could hear them making a great talk; and I was sure they were all in the recess staring at the window, and laughing as the silly lassie. Let them laugh! I felt above all that now. At dinner I was very restless, hurrying to get it over; and I think Aunt Mary was restless too. I doubt whether she read her *Times* when it came; she opened it up so as to shield her, and watched from a corner. And I settled myself in the recess, with my heart full of expectation. I wanted nothing more than to see him writing at his table, and to turn his head and give me a little wave of his hand, just to show that he knew I was there. I sat from half-past seven o'clock to ten o'clock: and the daylight grew softer and softer, till at last it was as if it was shining through a pearl, and not a shadow to be seen. But the window all the time was as black as night, and there was nothing, nothing there.

Well: but other nights it had been like that; he would not be

there every night only to please me. There are other things in a man's life, a great learned man like that. I said to myself I was not disappointed. Why should I be disappointed? There had been other nights when he was not there. Aunt Mary watched me, every movement I made, her eyes shining, often wet, with a pity in them that almost made me cry: but I felt as if I were more sorry for her than for myself. And then I flung myself upon her, and asked her, again and again, what it was, and who it was, imploring her to tell me if she knew? and when she had seen him, and what had happened? and what it meant about the women of our blood? She told me that how it was she could not tell, nor when: it was just at the time it had to be; and that we all saw him in our time—"that is," she said, "the ones that are like you and me." What was it that made her and me different from the rest? but she only shook her head and would not tell me. "They say," she said, and then stopped short. "Oh, honey, try and forget all about it—if I had but known you were of that kind! They say—that once there was one that was a Scholar, and liked his books more than any lady's love. Honey, do not look at me like that. To think I should have brought all this on you!"

"He was a Scholar?" I cried.

"And one of us, that must have been a light woman, not like you and me—— But may be it was just in innocence; for who can tell? She waved to him and waved to him to come over: and yon ring was the token: but he would not come. But still she sat at her window and waved and waved—till at last her brothers heard of it, that were stirring men; and then——oh, my honey, let us speak of it no more!"

"They killed him!" I cried, carried away. And then I grasped her with my hands, and gave her a shake, and flung away from her. "You tell me that to throw dust in my eyes—when I saw him only last night: and he as living as I am, and as young!"

"My honey, my honey!" Aunt Mary said.

After that I would not speak to her for a long time; but she kept close to me, never leaving me when she could help it, and always with that pity in her eyes. For the next night it was the same: and the third night. That third night I thought I could not bear it any longer. I would have to do something—if only I knew what to do! If it would ever get dark, quite dark, there might be something to be done. I had wild dreams of stealing out of the house and getting a ladder, and mounting up to try if I could not open that window, in the middle of the night—if

perhaps I could get the baker's boy to help me; and then my mind got into a whirl, and it was as if I had done it; and I could almost see the boy put the ladder to the window, and hear him cry out that there was nothing there. Oh, how slow it was, the night! and how light it was, and everything so clear—no darkness to cover you, no shadow, whether on one side of the street or on the other side! I could not sleep, though I was forced to go to bed. And in the deep midnight, when it is dark dark in every other place, I slipped very softly downstairs, though there was one board on the landing-place that creaked—and opened the door and stepped out. There was not a soul to be seen, up or down, from the Abbey to the West Port: and the trees stood like ghosts, and the silence was terrible, and everything as clear as day. You don't know what silence is till you find it in the light like that, not morning but night, no sunrising, no shadow, but everything as clear as the day.

It did not make any difference as the slow minutes went on: one o'clock, two o'clock. How strange it was to hear the clocks striking in that dead light when there was nobody to hear them! But it made no difference. The window was quite blank; even the marking of the panes seemed to have melted away. I stole up again after a long time, through the silent house, in the clear light, cold and trembling, with despair in my heart.

I am sure Aunt Mary must have watched and seen me coming back, for after a while I heard faint sounds in the house; and very early, when there had come a little sunshine into the air, she came to my bedside with a cup of tea in her hand; and she, too, was looking like a ghost. "Are you warm, honey—are you comfortable?" she said. "It doesn't matter," said I. I did not feel as if anything mattered; unless if one could get into the dark somwehere—the soft, deep dark that would cover you over and hide you—but I could not tell from what. The dreadful thing was that there was nothing, nothing to look for, nothing to hide from—only the silence and the light.

That day my mother came and took me home. I had not heard she was coming; she arrived quite unexpectedly, and said she had no time to stay, but must start the same evening so as to be in London next day, papa having settled to go abroad. At first I had a wild thought I would not go. But how can a girl say I will not, when her mother has come for her, and there is no reason, no reason in the world, to resist, and no right! I had to go, whatever I might wish or any one might say. Aunt Mary's dear

eyes were wet; she went about the house drying them quietly with her handkerchief, but she always said, "It is the best thing for you, honey—the best thing for you!" Oh, how I hated to hear it said that it was the best thing, as if anything mattered, one more than another! The old ladies were all there in the afternoon, Lady Carnbee looking at me from under her black lace, and the diamond lurking, sending out darts from under her finger. She patted me on the shoulder, and told me to be a good bairn. "And never lippen to what you see from the window," she said. "The eye is deceitful as well as the heart." She kept patting me on the shoulder, and I felt again as if that sharp wicked stone stung me. Was that what Aunt Mary meant when she said yon ring was the token? I thought afterwards I saw the mark on my shoulder. You will say why? How can I tell why? If I had known, I should have been contented, and it would not have mattered any more.

I never went back to St. Rule's, and for years of my life I never again looked out of a window when any other window was in sight. You ask me did I ever see him again? I cannot tell: the imagination is a great deceiver, as Lady Carnbee said: and if he stayed there so long, only to punish the race that had wronged him, why should I ever have seen him again? for I had received my share. But who can tell what happens in a heart that often, often, and so long as that, comes back to do its errand? If it was he whom I have seen again, the anger is gone from him, and he means good and no longer harm to the house of the woman that loved him. I have seen his face looking at me from a crowd. There was one time when I came home a widow from India, very sad, with my little children: I am certain I saw him there among all the people coming to welcome their friends. There was nobody to welcome me—for I was not expected: and very sad was I, without a face I knew: when all at once I saw him, and he waved his hand to me. My heart leaped up again: I had forgotten who he was, but only that it was a face I knew, and I landed almost cheerfully, thinking here was some one who would help me. But he had disappeared, as he did from the window, with that one wave of his hand.

And again I was reminded of it all when old Lady Carnbee died—an old, old woman—and it was found in her will that she had left me that diamond ring. I am afraid of it still. It is locked up in an old sandal-wood box in the lumber-room in the little

old country-house which belongs to me, but where I never live. If any one would steal it, it would be a relief to my mind. Yet I never knew what Aunt Mary meant when she said, "Yon ring was the token," nor what it could have to do with that strange window in the old College Library of St. Rule's.

Barry Pain

ROSE ROSE

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Sefton stepped back from his picture. "Rest now, please," he said.

Miss Rose Rose, his model, threw the striped blanket around her, stepped down from the throne, and crossed the studio. She seated herself on the floor near the big stove. For a few moments Sefton stood motionless, looking critically at his work. Then he laid down his palette and brushes and began to roll a cigarette. He was a man of forty, thick-set, round-faced, with a reddish moustache turned fiercely upwards. He flung himself down in an easy-chair, and smoked in silence till silence seemed ungracious.

"Well," he said, "I've got the place hot enough for you today, Miss Rose."

"You 'ave indeed," said Miss Rose.

"I bet it's nearer eighty than seventy."

The cigarette-smoke made a blue haze in the hot, heavy air. He watched it undulating, curving, melting.

As he watched it Miss Rose continued her observations. The trouble with these studios was the draughts. With a strong east wind, same as yesterday, you might have the stove red-hot, and yet never get the place, so to speak, warm. It is possible to talk commonly without talking like a coster, and Miss Rose achieved it. She did not always neglect the aspirate. She never quite substituted the third vowel for the first. She rather enjoyed long words.

She was beautiful from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot; and few models have good feet. Every pose she took was graceful. She was the daughter of a model, and had been

herself a model from childhood. In consequence, she knew her work well and did it well. On one occasion, when sitting for the great Merion, she had kept the same pose, without a rest, for three consecutive hours. She was proud of that. Naturally she stood in the first rank among models, was most in demand, and made the most money. Her fault was that she was slightly capricious; you could not absolutely depend upon her. On a wintry morning when every hour of daylight was precious, she might keep her appointment, she might be an hour or two late, or she might stay away altogether. Merion himself had suffered from her, had sworn never to employ her again, and had gone back to her.

Sefton, as he watched the blue smoke, found that her common accent jarred on him. It even seemed to make it more difficult for him to get the right presentation of the "Aphrodite" that she was helping him to paint. One seemed to demand a poetical and cultured soul in so beautiful a body. Rose Rose was not poetical nor cultured; she was not even business-like and educated.

Half an hour of silent and strenuous work followed. Then Sefton growled that he could not see any longer.

"We'll stop for to-day," he said. Miss Rose Rose retired behind the screen. Sefton opened a window and both ventilators, and rolled another cigarette. The studio became rapidly cooler.

"To-morrow, at nine?" he called out.

"I've got some way to come," came the voice of Miss Rose from behind the screen. "I could be here by a quarter past."

"Right," said Sefton, as he slipped on his coat.

When Rose Rose emerged from the screen she was dressed in a blue serge costume, with a picture-hat. As it was her business in life to be beautiful, she never wore corsets, high heels, nor pointed toes. Such abnegation is rare among models.

"I say, Mr. Sefton," said Rose, "you were to settle at the end of the sittings, but——"

"Oh, you don't want any money, Miss Rose. You're known to be rich."

"Well, what I've got is in the Post Office, and I don't want to touch it. And I've got some shopping I must do before I go home."

Sefton pulled out his sovereign-case hesitatingly.

"This is all very well, you know," he said.

"I know what you are thinking, Mr. Sefton. You think I don't

mean to come to-morrow. That's all Mr. Merion, now, isn't it? He's always saying things about me. I'm not going to stick it. I'm going to 'ave it out with 'im."

"He recommended you to me. And I'll tell you what he said, if you won't repeat it. He said that I should be lucky if I got you, and that I'd better chain you to the studio."

"And all because I was once late—with a good reason for it, too. Besides, what's once? I suppose he didn't 'appen to tell you how often he's kept me waiting."

"Well, here you are, Miss Rose. But you'll really be here in time to-morrow, won't you? Otherwise the thing will have got too tacky to work into."

"You needn't worry about that," said Miss Rose, eagerly. "I'll be here, whatever happens, by a quarter past nine. I'll be here if I die first! There, is that good enough for you? Good afternoon, and thank you, Mr. Sefton."

"Good afternoon, Miss Rose. Let me manage that door for you—the key goes a bit stiffly."

Sefton came back to his picture. In spite of Miss Rose's vehement assurances he felt by no means sure of her, but it was difficult for him to refuse any woman anything, and impossible for him to refuse to pay her what he really owed. He scrawled in charcoal some directions to the charwoman who would come in the morning. She was, from his point of view, a prize charwoman—one who could, and did, wash brushes properly, one who understood the stove, and would, when required, refrain from sweeping. He picked up his hat and went out. He walked the short distance from his studio to his bachelor flat, looked over an evening paper as he drank his tea, and then changed his clothes and took a cab to the club for dinner. He played one game of billiards after dinner, and then went home. His picture was very much in his mind. He wanted to be up fairly early in the morning, and he went to bed early.

He was at his studio by half-past eight. The stove was lighted, and he piled more coke on it. His "Aphrodite" seemed to have a somewhat mocking expression. It was a little, technical thing, to be corrected easily. He set his palette and selected his brushes. An attempt to roll a cigarette revealed the fact that his pouch was empty. It still wanted a few minutes to nine. He would have time to go up to the tobacconist at the corner. In case Rose Rose arrived while he was away, he left the studio door open. The tobacconist was also a newsagent, and he bought a morning

paper. Rose would probably be twenty minutes late at the least, and this would be something to occupy him.

But on his return he found his model already stepping on to the throne.

"Good morning, Miss Rose. You're a lady of your word." He hardly heeded the murmur which came to him as a reply. He threw his cigarette into the stove, picked up his palette, and got on excellently. The work was absorbing. For some time he thought of nothing else. There was no relaxing on the part of the model—no sign of fatigue. He had been working for over an hour, when his conscience smote him. "We'll have a rest now, Miss Rose," he said cheerily. At the same moment he felt human fingers drawn lightly across the back of his neck, just above the collar. He turned round with a sudden start. There was nobody there. He turned back again to the throne. Rose Rose had vanished.

With the utmost care and deliberation he put down his palette and brushes. He said in a loud voice, "Where are you, Miss Rose?" For a moment or two silence hung in the hot air of the studio.

He repeated his question and got no answer. Then he stepped behind the screen, and suddenly the most terrible thing in his life happened to him. He knew that his model had never been there at all.

There was only one door out to the back street in which his studio was placed, and that door was now locked. He unlocked it, put on his hat, and went out. For a minute or two he paced the street, but he had got to go back to the studio.

He went back, sat down in the easy-chair, lit a cigarette, and tried for a plausible explanation. Undoubtedly he had been working very hard lately. When he had come back from the tobacconist's to the studio he had been in the state of expectant attention, and he was enough of a psychologist to know that in that state you are especially likely to see what you expect to see. He was not conscious of anything abnormal in himself. He did not feel ill, or even nervous. Nothing of the kind had ever happened to him before. The more he considered the matter, the more definite became his state. He was thoroughly frightened. With a great effort he pulled himself together and picked up the newspaper. It was certain that he could do no more work for that day, anyhow. An ordinary, commonplace newspaper would restore him. Yes, that was it. He had been too much wrapped

up in the picture. He had simply supposed the model to be there.

He was quite unconvinced, of course, and merely trying to convince himself. As an artist, he knew that for the last hour or more he had been getting the most delicate modelling right from the living form before him. But he did his best, and read the newspaper assiduously. He read of tariff, protection, and of a new music-hall star. Then his eye fell on a paragraph headed "Motor Fatalities."

He read that Miss Rose, an artist's model, had been knocked down by a car in the Fulham Road about seven o'clock on the previous evening; that the owner of the car had stopped and taken her to the hospital, and that she had expired within a few minutes of admission.

He rose from his place and opened a large pocket-knife. There was a strong impulse upon him, and he felt it to be a mad impulse, to slash the canvas to rags. He stopped before the picture. The face smiled at him with a sweetness that was scarcely earthly.

He went back to his chair again. "I'm not used to this kind of thing," he said aloud. A board creaked at the far end of the studio. He jumped up with a start of horror. A few minutes later he had left the studio, and locked the door behind him. His common sense was still with him. He ought to go to a specialist. But the picture——

. . . . . .

"What's the matter with Sefton?" said Devigne one night at the club after dinner.

"Don't know that anything's the matter with him," said Merion. "He hasn't been here lately."

"I saw him the last time he was here, and he seemed pretty queer. Wanted to let me his studio."

"It's not a bad studio," said Merion, dispassionately.

"He's got rid of it now, anyhow. He's got a studio out at Richmond, and the deuce of a lot of time he must waste getting there and back. Besides, what does he do about models?"

"That's a point I've been wondering about myself," said Merion. "He'd got Rose Rose for his 'Aphrodite,' and it looked as if it might be a pretty good thing when I saw it. But, as you know, she died. She was troublesome in some ways, but, taking

her all round, I don't know where to find anybody as good to-day. What's Sefton doing about it?"

"He hasn't got a model at all at present. I know that for a fact, because I asked him."

"Well," said Merion, "he may have got the thing on further than I thought he would in the time. Some chaps can work from memory all right, though I can't do it myself. He's not chucked the picture, I suppose?"

"No; he's not done that. In fact, the picture's his excuse now, if you want him to go anywhere and do anything. But that's not it: the chap's altogether changed. He used to be a genial sort of bounder—bit tyrannical in his manner, perhaps—thought he knew everything. Still, you could talk to him. He was sociable. As a matter of fact, he did know a good deal. Now it's quite different. If you ever do see him—and that's not often—he's got nothing to say to you. He's just going back to his work. That sort of thing."

"You're too imaginative," said Merion. "I never knew a man who varied less than Sefton. Give me his address, will you? I mean his studio. I'll go and look him up one morning. I should like to see how that 'Aphrodite's' getting on. I tell you it was promising; no nonsense about it."

. . . . . .

One sunny morning Merion knocked at the door of the studio at Richmond. He heard the sound of footsteps crossing the studio, then Sefton's voice rang out.

"Who's there?"

"Merion. I've travelled miles to see the thing you call a picture."

"I've got a model."

"And what does that matter?" asked Merion.

"Well, I'd be awfully glad if you'd come back in an hour. We'd have lunch together somewhere."

"Right," said Merion, sardonically. "I'll come back in about seven million hours. Wait for me."

He went back to London and his own studio in a state of fury. Sefton had never been a man to pose. He had never put on side about his work. He was always willing to show it to old and intimate friends whose judgment he could trust; and now, when the oldest of his friends had travelled down to Richmond to see him,

he was told to come back in an hour, and that they might then lunch together!

"This lets me out," said Merion, savagely.

. . . . . .

But he always speaks well of Sefton nowadays. He maintains that Sefton's "Aphrodite" would have been a success anyhow. The suicide made a good deal of talk at the time, and a special attendant was necessary to regulate the crowds round it, when, as directed by his will, the picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy. He was found in his studio many hours after his death; and he had scrawled on a blank canvas, much as he left his directions to his charwoman: "I have finished it, but I can't stand any more."

Eden Phillpotts

THE IRON PINEAPPLE

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It will comfort me to write it. It comforted me to tell my wife, but that consolation vanished when she refused to believe the story and proposed to send for a medical man.

There may be scientific people who could explain what happened to me; there may be names for the state, and it is possible that others have suffered similarly, and done equally amazing things, but in my humble position of life one has no time for works on morbid psychology or its therapeutics, and I prefer to explain all differently and directly. I choose rather to assert that it pleased Providence to select me on a unique occasion for its own profound purposes.

That is how I explain it now, but to be the weapon of Providence in a great matter is not a part that any sane small shopkeeper would choose, and none will ever know the extent of my sufferings while the secret forces that control our destinies had their terrible way with me; none will ever fathom my awful woes and fears as I tottered on the brink of downright madness; none will ever look into the unutterable chasm that for a season yawned between me and my fellow-creatures.

I was cut off from them; I lived a hideous life apart. No human eye penetrated those dark fastnesses of the spirit where I wandered, lost; no friendly voice sounded for me; no sympathy nor understanding came to my side and heartened me to conquer the appalling tribulation.

Doubtless, in some measure, the fault was my own. There were not a few who respected me, and would have done all they might to help me. My wife—what man ever had better? She was always ready, and her gentle tact paved a way for me through many a neurotic storm and morbid ecstasy, but the secret thing, the obsession of my life, was hidden from her. For shame I hid it; even to her I could not confess its nature and the profound and shattering effect it had upon my self-control and my self-respect.

The nature of this curse will best appear in the course of my narrative. John Noy is my name, and I dwell in the Cornish haven of Bude. Hither from Holsworthy I came, twenty years ago, but the prosperity that has of late burst in a grateful shower over Bude, converting it from an obscure hamlet to a prosperous resort, was not shared by me.

I keep a small grocery-store, and sell fruit and vegetables also; while to eke out my modest means I control a branch of the post-office, and so add little to my income, but much to my daily labours; for the paltry remuneration of one pound one shilling a month is all that accrues to me for my service in this great department of the State.

I had hoped that in the rising districts of Flexbury, where new houses were springing up like mushrooms, and often with little more than a mushroom's stability, the post-office might have opened a way to increased custom, and added to the importance and popularity of my little business. But it never did so. Occasional notepaper and sealing-wax I disposed of, but no respectable augmentation of my own trade could be chronicled as a result of the post-office, while, in holiday time, the work proved—and still proves—too much for one head and one pair of hands. Then my clever wife comes to my assistance; and, even so, our accounts do not always balance.

Of course, Bude is not what it was when first I wedded Mabel Polglaze and took my shop. Now an enormous summer population pours upon us annually, and the golf-links swarm with men and women, who pursue that sport from dawn till evening; and the wide sands of the shore are covered with children who,

in their picturesque attire, are scattered there, like pink and blue, yellow and white flower-petals blowing over the sands when the tide is out.

I never had any children; and it was a grief to my wife, but a secret joy to me—not because I do not love them, but because, after marriage, my infatuation dawned upon me, and I quickly felt that to hand on such mysterious traits of character would be criminal in the opinion of any conscientious soul.

The cloud ascended by slow degrees upon my clear horizon, and not until it had assumed some quality of sinister significance did I give it much thought. Indeed, in its earliest manifestation, I took pride in it; and my wife, even from our betrothal, was wont to compliment me upon a certain quality of mind often associated with ultimate prosperity and worldly success.

"Noy," she said to me on one occasion, "your grasp of details is the most remarkable thing about you. You'll fasten on a thing like a dog on a bone, and nought will shake you off it. Whether 'tis sardines, or dried fruits, or spring vegetables, or a new tea, 'twill grip your mind in a most amazing way, and you'll let everything else slip by, and just go for that one object, and keep it in the front of your thoughts, and live on it, like food. And a very fine quality in a grocer; and many a time you've pushed a line and made the public take a new thing. But what's queer about it, in my judgment, is that, so often as not, you'll put all your heart and soul into some stupid little matter, like a new mouse-trap or new vermin-killer, that don't pay for the trouble. You'll give just so much thought to a penwiper or bottle-washer, not worth six-pence, as you will to a new drink or new food, or some big thing that might mean good money, and plenty of it."

There she hit the nail on the head. I had a way to take some particular matter into my mind, as the hedge-sparrow takes the cuckoo's egg into her nest, and then, when the thing hatched out, all else had to go down before it, and for a season I was a man of one idea, and only one. Had those ideas been important; had I conceived brilliant plans for Bude, or even for myself, none could have quarrelled with this power of concentration, or suspected that any infirmity of mind lurked behind it, but, as my wife too faithfully pointed out, I was prone to expend my rich stores of nervous energy upon the most trifling and insignificant matters.

Once I caught a grasshopper in our little garden, and for two years I had no mind to anything but grasshoppers. I purchased

works on entomology which I could ill afford; I collected grasshoppers, and spent long hours in studying their manners and customs; I tamed a grass hopper, and finally acquired a knowledge of these insects that has probably never been equalled in the history of the world.

I fought this down with my wife's help, but it was the beginning of worse things; and after she had lost her temper, and expressed her opinion of such puerilities in good set terms, I grew afraid, and began to conceal my mind from her. Then I found that, unconsciously, my frankness in all matters of the soul with Mabel had helped to keep me straight, and been a shield between me and the horrid idiosyncrasies of my nature.

The descent to hell was easy, and, after barriers were once raised between my aberration and her common sense, the former grew by leaps and bounds. A change came over my horrid interests. Formerly it was some comestible or contrivance in my shop that had fixed my attention and chained my energies, to the loss of more important things; for the grasshoppers arrived, as it were, before their time, and for many years after I had struggled free of their influence I suffered no similar lapse. But, having once adopted the practice of simulation with Mabel, having once withheld from her the secrets of my heart, the deterioration proceeded apace: I ceased to be vitally interested in my shop; I wandered afield, and fastened on subjects and objects altogether outside my own life. These I brought into the very heart of my own mystery, and welcomed and worshipped. They were unconceivably trivial: in that lay the growing horror.

To give an example: I remembered how for a time one monument in the churchyard arrested and absorbed my receptive faculties. Many nameless dead, victims of the sea, sleep their last sleep in our green churchyard upon the hill, and here, above a ship's company drowned long since at the haven mouth, there stands with a certain propriety the figurehead of their wrecked vessel. As it advanced before them in life, hanging above the ocean and leaping to the wave, so now in death the image keeps guard above their pillows, and stands, tall and white, among the lesser monuments of the mortuary. So it has stood for nearly fifty years, and promises long to continue, for it is preserved carefully and guarded against destruction.

This wooden image of the ill-fated "Bencoolan" exercised a most dreadful fascination over me; and I cannot tell now how often I visited it, touched it, and poured out my futile thoughts

as an offering to it. The figure of the Asiatic chieftain became to me an incubus and exercised a mesmeric power of attraction under which for a season I suffered helplessly. Indeed, I only escaped by abandoning the Church of England and joining the sect of the Primitive Wesleyans. I avoided the church and the grave of the drowned men; I struggled against the horrible attraction of the figure-head. At night I woke and sweated and fought to keep in my couch, and I locked my arms through the bedstead that I might not be torn away to that solemn effigy above the graves.

The Primitive Wesleyans had a chapel within ten minutes' walk of my shop. It was new; the foundation-stone had been laid but two years before by that famous Wesleyan philanthropist, financier and friend of man, Bolsover Barbellion. The building, in the last and most debased form of architecture ever sprung from a mean mind, dominated Flexbury, and stood, a mass of hideous stone and baleful brick, above the pitiful rows of new dwelling-houses. But it saved me from the figurehead of the "Bencoolan," and for a time the ministrations of the Primitive Wesleyans soothed my soul, and offered peace through the channels of religious novelty. I owe them much, and gladly record my debt.

Instances as grim as the foregoing might be cited, but I hasten to the climax of the tragedy and the events that preceded it. My wife, after a lengthened period, during which too surely we had drifted apart in sympathy and mutual understanding, took me to task, and her acerbity, while well enough deserved, none the less caused me a wide measure of astonishment. Never had she struck this note until this hour.

"Why the mischief can't you turn your attention to keeping a roof over our heads?" she asked. "Trade's never been worse, and you'll lose the post-office afore another summer if you make any more mistakes. And here's things happening in the world that might make angels weep. Look at yesterday's paper—all of them benevolent societies come down like a pack of cards, and that saint of God, as we thought—that Bolsover Barbellion—turns out to be a limb of Satan instead. And your own sister ruined, and widows and orphans face to face with the workhouse from one end of England to the other! And the scoundrel himself has vanished like the dew upon the fleece, as well he may do. And there's another coal strike, the like of which was never knowed, and there's a murder to Plymouth, and talk of war with Germany, and God knows what beside! Yet you—you can live in this world as if you was no more than a sheep or a cow, and pour out your

wits in secret on some twopenny-halfpenny thing that you be too ashamed even to speak about. Yes; you can, and you do. I know you—if not me, who should? I hear you a-tossing like a ship in a storm of a night, and you won't let me comfort you no more. And life's hell to a woman placed like me, and I don't say how much longer I'm going to stand it! How do I know what's in your mind? How can I help you and comfort you if I'm kept outside in the dark? All I can tell is that you're mad on something, for you're always out now—always walking up and down on the cliffs as if you was a sentry or a coastguard. And some fine day you'll fall over, and that'll be a nice scandal; for there's no smoke without fire, and of course they'll whisper 'twas me that drove you to it."

Thus she ran on, and I made no attempt to stay the torrent. My last infatuation differed widely from all others, for it was human; and had it been a woman, by evil chance, doubtless my home had crashed down under it, for Mrs. Noy was not of the type that tolerates any largeness of view in matters of sex. But a man had for three months exercised an unconscious control upon me—a large, bearded, able-bodied artist, who devoted his attention to our cliff scenery, and who painted pictures in the open air on Bude sands.

I never spoke to him. He was not even aware that he had an interested spectator, but from the day I first looked over the low cliffs near the cricket-ground, and saw the top of the painter's hat, I was lost, and became concentrated upon the man. He dominated my thoughts, and I felt ill at ease on the days that I did not see him. I made no effort to learn his name or ascertain where he lodged, but I speculated deeply concerning him and the value of his art, and the workings of his mind and his ambitions and hopes and fears. He had an interesting face and a large voice, and rejoiced to watch the children playing on the beach. He painted ill—so, at least, I thought.

It seemed to me that he was an impressionist, and I felt aversion from that school, being ignorant of its principles. Once he left his seat among the rocks to walk beside the sea a while, and I emerged from the cliff above, whence I had been watching him, and descended and looked at his picture. Something urged me to sit on his campstool, and I did so. He turned, saw me, and approached. But the tide was out, and he had to walk nearly a quarter of a mile to his easel. I hastened away and hid from him, and watched him exhibit no small surprise when he returned. He

examined his picture closely to see that I had not meddled with it.

From that day I conceived a violent dislike to the artist, and this emotion increased to loathing; then waxed from that until it grew into an acute and homicidal hatred. Why such an awful passion should have wakened in me against this harmless painter it was impossible to understand.

I had never hated man or mouse until that moment; and now, full-fledged, insistent, tigerish, there awoke within me an antagonism one would have supposed impossible to so mild a mannered man. I fought it as I had never fought any previous obsession; I told myself that rather than do any violence to a fellow-creature I would destroy my own body. Time and again, tramping the cliffs to peep down upon the unconscious painter beneath, I urged myself to take a false step, and do even as my wife had predicted that I might do. To escape from this fiendish premonition, to die and be at peace, grew an ever-increasing temptation. But I lacked physical courage; I could not kill myself. I would have endured any mental torment rather than do so.

I met the painter face to face sometimes, and a demon might have felt his anti-human passion grow weak before the man's kind, good-natured face, great brown beard, laughing brown eyes, and sonorous, genial voice, but my antipathy only increased. It was, so far as I could analyse, quite without motive—a mere destructive instinct that made me tremble to batter and crush out of living this fellow-soul.

I determined to consult a medical man, but hesitated to do so for fear that he would insist upon my incarceration. I was not mad —save in the particular of my passing infatuations; and, as all the others until now had persisted only for a season, I wept on my knees and prayed to Heaven through long night watches that this awful and crowning trial might also pass from me, and give place to hallucinations less terrific and less fraught with peril to my fellow-creatures.

As if in answer to this prayer there came sudden and astounding relief; my aberrations changed their direction; for a season I forgot the painter as though he had never been born, and every hope, desire, and mental energy became concentrated on the humblest and most insignificant object it is possible to mention. It was the lowest depth that I had reached.

On rising ground, not far distant from my shop, were being erected certain new dwelling-houses, and one of these had always

pleased me, because it stood as an oasis in the dreary desert of mean buildings rising round about. It was designed in the Italian style, and possessed a distinction, beauty, and reserve foreign to the neighbourhood of Bude and the architectural spirit of the district. An outer wall encompassed this dwelling, and light metal-work ran along the top of it.

To my horror I discovered that a conventional chain was to be erected, and, at intervals of ten feet, the chain was supported by metal pillars crowned with cast-iron pineapples. Why a pleasing building should thus be spoiled by a piece of gratuitous vulgarity I could not understand. But speculation swiftly ceased, for suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, as such ebullitions always came, there burst upon me a frantic lust for one of these same abortions in iron! My soul poured out upon a metal pineapple; and no general hunger or distributed desire for the vile things took hold upon me, but I found my life's energy focussed and concentrated upon the third pineapple on the north side of the railing. For the rest I entertained no attachment; I even disliked them; but the third on the northern side exercised an absolute mastery.

If one may quote a familiar jest in connection with so abhorrent a circumstance, I felt, concerning this hideous piece of cast-iron, that I should not be happy until I got it. Naked roads stretched about this new house. They ran through fields, presently to be built upon, and they were usually deserted, as they led no whither. I was able, therefore, to haunt the iron pineapple, to stroke it, gloat over it, and gratify in some sort my abnormal desire toward it without exciting attention. Indeed, the cunning of actual lunacy marked each new downfall, and, with the exception of Mabel, no human creature as yet had suspected my infirmity.

The pineapple swiftly became an all-absorbing passion, and I fought against its fascination without avail. The desire for possession made this experience especially difficult, because as a rule the attractive object always drew me to be with it, whereas, in this case, there came a frantic longing to have the pineapple with me. I must have thought of the rubbish as a sentient being; I must have exaggerated it into a creature that could feel and sorrow and understand. On wet nights I conceived that the iron pineapple might suffer cold; on hot days I feared that it was enduring discomfort from the summer sun! From the ease and peace of my bed, I pictured the pineapple perched on its lonely pedestal in outer darkness. When there raged a thunderstorm, I feared that the lightning would strike the pineapple and destroy it for ever.

Then an overwhelming determination to secure the pineapple quite possessed me. Therefore I stole it by night. At an hour when a waning moon silvered that rising district of empty houses and unbounded roads, I set forth, crept into the shadow of the Italian dwelling, and, after working with a file for half an hour, won the valueless treasure. Once, during my operations, a policeman passed upon his beat; and I hid in the porch hard by and wondered what the man would have done had he discovered the postmaster and provision merchant, John Noy, thus occupied between the morning hours of two and three.

To a sleeping wife I returned, and the pineapple was concealed in a drawer that contained my Sunday clothes.

The mass of metal weighed two pounds, and for a week I racked my brains to find fresh hiding-places for it. Now I concealed it under the earth in my garden; now I hid it in the shop; now I took it about with me, wrapped up in a parcel.

The trash was never out of my mind. Moreover, a reward of one guinea had been offered for discovery of the person reponsible for its disappearance. The owner of the Italian villa himself brought a printed advertisement to me containing the promise. I stuck it up against my shop-window with two blue wafers, and soothed him. He was much annoyed, and declared that a fool capable of such wilful and aimless destruction should be captured and locked up for the benefit of the community. How cordially I agreed with him! And all the while I looked down at a sack of dried peas at his feet, in which the iron pineapple was hidden.

And now the psychology of the mental situation took a turn, and my last two phases of infatuation ran into each other, as one line of rails merges into the next. The iron pineapple and the artist were inextricably mingled in my distracted mind. The one I loved, the other I hated; and I told myself that not until these two concrete ideas had come together and completed their diverse destinies might my own soul hope for any sort of peace.

So Providence set my brain to the task of fulfilling its inscrutable designs while I, ignorant of that supernatural purpose, merely looked into the darkness of my own heart and cowered before the lurid phantom of madness that I seemed to see advancing upon me from within it. I believed myself now definitely insane, but I was powerless to save the situation; indeed, an instinct far stronger than that of self-preservation held me in absolute subjection.

I walked on the cliffs and in the lonely lanes, and babbled my

problem to the seagulls and the wayside flowers. By night I submitted it to the stars of heaven. In sleep I uttered it aloud, as my wife testified too surely on an occasion of my waking.

We slept with a night-lamp, and on suddenly returning to consciousness I perceived Mabel sitting up and regarding my prostrate form in dismay. The extremity of concern marked her features. I recollect how the shadow of her head (decorated with curling-pins, or some other metal contrivances which hung from it, glittering in the mild beam of the night-light) was thrown enormous upon the ceiling, in an outline that suggested the map of the continent of Africa.

"Holy angels!" she began. "What's the matter with you now? You've been babbling like something out of a child's fairy book—like that there *Alice in Wonderland* Mrs. Hussey lent you, and you thought was funny, and I couldn't for the life of me laugh over. You keep on: 'The pineapple and the painter; the painter and the pineapple, and quantities of sand!' And if I'm going mad, you'd better tell me so; and if I'm not, then, sure as quarter-day, you are. It can't go on. No woman could stand it!"

I strove to lead her mind into other channels. I explained that I wanted my signboard repainted, and that I proposed to buy a few West Indian pines from time to time to add to the attractions of our fruit department. We then discussed the advent of my only sister—an elderly spinster ruined by the recent collapse of certain benevolent societies. Between a home under my roof and the union workhouse there was literally no choice for her, and, ill as I could afford to support her, my sense of duty left me no alternative but to do so.

It fell out, however, that the forthcoming day was to witness greater matters than the arrival of Susan Noy at Bude. Of late the terrific problem of how to bring the loved pineapple and the hated painter together had made me more than usually inattentive to business. I wandered much, and chiefly by the sea it was that I passed my time. At low tide I walked upon the sands, or sat and brooded among the gaunt rocks, where purple mussels grew in clusters like grapes. At high tide I tramped the cliffs, and reclining upon them, watched the ships pass by on the horizon of the ocean; or gazed where Lundy, like a blue cloud, arose from the waves.

Here I was in the company of elemental things, and from them alone at this season did my tortured spirit win any sort of hope. The breaking billows and the broad pathway of light that fell

upon them at sunset; the dark faces of the rocks, that watched from under beetling brows for the coming storm; the passage of wine-coloured shadows on the sea; the anthem of the great west wind, that made the precipice his cymbal and the crag his harp —these things alone brought a measure of peace to my soul. But calm it wholly they could not; solve the grotesque problem, that haunted me like a presence, they could not. I lived only to know how the iron pineapple and the cliff painter should be brought together into one idea—indivisible, corporate, compact.

It was fitting that the problem of a lunatic should be solved by a madman. For mad I most certainly was upon this day—one of God's chosen, to work His will through the dark machinery of a temporary mental alienation, a man deliberately robbed of his reason through certain terrific moments that the Everlasting Will might be manifested upon earth to the vindication of His all-watchfulness and justice!

The hour was afternoon, the day one in late August, and I walked out upon the cliffs at a moment when general exodus from shore began; for the luncheon-time approached, and a long line of children, mothers, and nursemaids began to drift away inland from the pleasures of the beach. At one o'clock cliffs and shore were alike deserted for a season, and a pedestrian might also cross the links with safety. The golfers had ceased from troubling.

Now, upon a high cliff north of the bathing-places I wandered, weighted literally, as well as mentally, by my eternal problem. For in my breast-pocket, bulging and dragging me forward at a more acute angle than usual, was the iron pineapple. Why, I know not. But often now I carried it with me, and, when hidden from gaze of man, would display it as though study of the actual object was likely to help my deliberations.

To-day, at the cliff-edge, I dragged it out, and laid it down where the short turf was already becoming seared under August suns. A dwarf betony, with purple bloom, grew at my elbow, and cushions of pink thrift, their blossoms now reduced to mere empty, silver tufts, clung close at hand on the cliff-faces. One crow's-feather, fallen on the grass, moved two yards away as the wind touched it, and the sun flashed upon its shining black plume; upon the downs a red sheep or two browsed on the sweet, close herbage. Inland rose the low hills, with their stuntetd trees and grey church towers ascending above them.

I was as lonely as man might be. The world had been deserted that our holiday folk might eat; and I realised to the full at this

moment how entirely had Bude become a pleasure-resort, how absolutely it depended for prosperity upon those who, when their hours of respite came, hastened to North Cornwall for change of air and a place to play in. Not until the eye passed far south to the breakwater and lock and little canal running therefrom, not until it marked the ketches lying there, did one perceive any human enterprise other than those devoted to amusement and relaxation.

The iron pineapples stood upon the turf at my hand. The lump of iron was polished to brightness by constant handling, and it flashed back the sunshine from the planes of the cone.

For a long time I stared at it, and revolved my fatuous problem. Then suddenly, from far below on the beach, there arose the sound of a human voice singing a song. It was a mellow, juicy voice; it was a mellow, juicy song. The first I recognised quickly enough; the second I had never heard before. To this day I cannot say whence came the words or tune, but they served well enough to express the singer's present contentment.

To sing such a pæan of joy with such infinite relish and abandonment proved beyond possibility of doubt that the lonely creature below me was happy, hopeful, and contented with his life and its possibilities. "He must," said I, "have sold one of his strange pictures at a good profit to himself, or he must have chanced on a kindred spirit, and met a heart that beats with his, an eye that sees with him. Life for him has surely brought some fresh beauty or joy, interest or fair promise, else he could not thus warble from his very soul with such bird-like content!" Needless to add that it was my big, brown-bearded artist who sang while he painted below.

I crept on my breast to the stark edge of the cliff, and looked down at him. He sat immediately beneath me, and I had leisure to note the curious perspective of his figure thus seen from high above his head. He wore a great grey wide-awake, and, beneath it, strangely foreshortened, bulged his big body squatted on a camp-stool. His legs did not appear; they were tucked under him. But his arms were visible. One hand held a palette and brushes; the other, the brush with which he was engaged. He accentuated the metre of his music by touches of paint on the drawing before him.

Then it seemed that the necessary inspiration struck me like a blow. Here were painter and pineapple in juxtaposition. They had approached each other more nearly than had ever happened

until that moment. Only some two hundred feet of vertical space separated them. And I felt that these two entities—the one precious in my esteem, and the other evil—must now conjoin and complete their predestined state in contact each with other.

It was at this moment that my own volition left me, and a Thing-not-myself took the helm of my life, and steered me forward. With a power of resolution very different from that possessed by my own, with a decision and grip and masculine vigour remote from my vacillation and fickleness, my brain determined, and my hand leapt to obey the order. The crisis swept me like a storm. I felt as a watcher, chained and gagged, yet free to mark the action of another close at hand. I took the iron pineapple, held it perpendicularly above the head of the happy songster below, steadied my arm, that no tremor should deflect the missile, and dropped it.

The metal fell two hundred feet or more, and struck the exact centre of the grey hat beneath me. I heard the sound of impact—a dull thud muffled by the felt of the hat. But the consequences were terrific. Lightning had not destroyed the happy songster more instantly or more absolutely. His arms shot forth, his song was strangled in his head; his big body gave a convulsive jerk in every limb, and he fell forward upon his easel, and brought it to the ground beneath him.

From the moment that he crashed face down into the sand and shingle he remained motionless. In his hands were still the palette and single brush; his legs were drawn up stiffly in the attitude of a man swimming; as I watched, the blood began to well out of his head and run away into the ground. The iron pineapple had fallen forward, and was now a foot in front of him in the middle of his picture.

I descended to see what I had done. I felt a consciousness of immense relief and satisfaction. I was free—I was sane! The cloud had lifted from my spirit. I knew by an overwhelming conviction that henceforth and for ever I should find myself as other men.

I hastened down the cliff, stood on the deserted shore, and approached the fallen painter. It was not until my foot trampled the bloodstained sand at his ear that I began to apprehend the force of the thing that I had committed. The pathos exhibited by the figure of this stricken wretch impressed itself upon me. He was stout and elderly—older than I had guessed. Yet he had been singing of the joys of love; he had chanted the charm of a lady

called "Julia" when my iron pineapple descended, as the bolt of Jove from the sky, and struck him into senseless clay. His beard stuck out at a ridiculous angle from beneath his prone face, and my sense of decency led me to touch him, move him, and bestow his corpse in a manner more orderly.

I determined to turn him over, straighten out his legs, and not leave him thus, humped up on his belly like a frog that a wheel had crushed in the night.

But my purpose was frustrated, and that happened which cast me into an untold abyss of horror, and sent me flying as one demented from my murdered man. I touched his beard, and the whole mass of it came off in my hand! This incident, while less terrible indeed than other things that happened, yet sufficed to upset my jubilant brain. Its quality of unexpectedness may have caused my revulsion. I cannot say; but whereas I faced the dead without a tremor, and prepared reverently to bestow his palpitating dust, so that no feeling of the indecent or grotesque should grate upon the minds of his discoverers, now this outrageous and bizarre surrender of his beard at a touch struck me like the departing shadow of the madness I had dropped away for ever with the dropping of the stolen metal. I shivered, and I screamed aloud. My voice echoed along the cliff-face and climbed it, rang over the rocks, and floated seaward, where the broad foam-belts broke upon the shore. But none heard me save a hawk hovering aloft; none saw my frenzied act as I flung the great mass of hair from me and ran away.

Once, in that retreat, I turned and saw the hair, like some living, amorphous monster—a creature of the deep sea and darkness rather than of earth and light—creeping over the level sands after me. And then, indeed, I shrieked amain, and sped for the cliffs and climbed a gully with such haste that my knees and knuckles were dripping blood before I reached the downs. Once there, I looked below in time to see the mass of hair caught up by the wind and blown afar into the sea.

That night I regained my peace, returned home, and slept as I had not slept for many years.

On the following day a West Country journal contained the following item of news:

> "An occurrence fraught with the profoundest horror is reported from the holiday resort of Bude, and a spot associated with innocent pleasure, the happiness of children, and the rest and recupera-

tion of jaded men of business, has suddenly become the sinister focus of an extraordinary and inexplicable crime. For the past six months a gentleman, named Walter Grant, has been residing in Victoria Road, at No. 9. The unfortunate artist—for such was his calling—devoted his attention to cliff scenery, and spent most of his time on Bude sands or in the immediate neighbourhood. And here he has mysteriously perished."

The crime was then recorded, and the theory advanced that an iron pineapple found beside the dead man was responsible for his destruction. The fact that he had gone to paint with a beard, and been discovered a clean-shaven corpse was also noted. It was added that the man had displayed a kindly and courteous nature, and become popular among the few who had made his acquaintance. Inquiry established the fact that he was quite unknown in art circles, and that he had proposed to leave Bude on the Saturday that followed his death.

The incident of the recent robbery of the iron pineapple, and this, its sensational reappearance, also served to make exciting "copy" for the papers; but a discovery which cast these trifles into the shade was destined next morning to fill not only our local journals. Then the English-speaking world discovered to its amazement that Bolsover Barbellion, the runaway rascal responsible for such widespread misery among the poor and needy, had been traced and discovered on the eve of his flight from England, and on the day after his flight from life. Not only the beard, but also the hair of the slain artist were discovered to be false, and investigations among his private papers established his identity beyond doubt.

A woman also came forward to testify it—a person named Julia Dalby. She and he were to have left England in a steamer from Plymouth on the Saturday after his departure from Bude, and she alone in the whole world knew his secret hiding-place. Their passages were already secured in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Grant, and they were about to sail for South America.

Not one shadow of suspicion ever fell upon me, but while my health was enormously improved, and my mind continued clear, my conscience was ill at ease, and the fact that my wife simply refused to credit the truth did not serve to lessen my unrest. A week after the actual event I visited our minister, and designed to place the facts before him and invite his criticism and direction, but on the occasion of our meeting he was so much concerned about a private anxiety that I delayed my confession. He

had determined that the corner-stone of our chapel must be extracted, for he held that no good would attend ministrations from a place of worship whose foundation had been laid by one of the greatest rascals recorded in modern history. The architect, however, demurred to this proposal, and submitted that to erase the inscription on the foundation-stone would surely meet the case. In grappling with this problem I forgot my own purpose of confession, and never more returned to it.

And to-day, sane and balanced of mind, I walk in the world of men and fear not the gaze of any fellow-creature. My life has taken a turn for the better; prosperity promises; the future never looked so fair. Above all, my mental balance is once more normal, and I enjoy a reputation for sound judgment and trustworthiness that brings my lesser neighbours to me in many of their difficulties.

And now I state the case against myself impartially and in print. I place myself without reserve at the mercy of man, and incidentally unravel a mystery that has puzzled the most astute intellects of our criminal service.

My theory—that for a fearful period I was the tool in Higher Hands, cannot, at least, be disproved, and I do not believe that any jury of my fellow-countrymen will condemn me to suffer for the part I played in the destruction of a most notorious enemy of society. Indeed, any earthly punishment would be an anti-climax and a jest at this hour. Nothing that wit of man might devise could put me again to the tortures of the days that are gone; or do more than reflect phantasmally the horror of the past.

Edgar Allan Poe

BERENICE

From *Tales of The Grotesque and The Arabesque.*

Dicebant mihi sodales, si sepulchrum amicæ visitarem, curas meas aliquantulum fore levatas.—EBN ZAIAT.

Misery is manifold. The wretchedness of earth is multiform. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues are as various as the hues of that arch,—as distant too, yet as intimately blended. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow! How is

it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness?—from the convenant of peace a simile of sorrow? But as, in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born. Either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of to-day, or the agonies which *are* have their origin in the ecstasies which *might have been.*

My baptismal name is Egæus; that of my family I will not mention. Yet there are no towers in the land time-honoured more than my gloomy, grey, hereditary halls. Our line has been called a race of visionaries; and in many striking particulars—in the character of the family mansion—in the frescoes of the chief saloon—in the tapestries of the dormitories—in the chiselling of some buttresses in the armoury—but more especially in the gallery of antique paintings—in the fashion of the library chamber—and, lastly, in the very peculiar nature of the library's contents, there is more than sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.

The recollections of my earliest years are connected with that chamber, and with its volumes—of which latter I will say no more. Here died my mother. Herein was I born. But it is mere idleness to say that I had not lived before—that the soul has no previous existence. You deny it?—let us not argue the matter. Convinced myself, I seek not to convince. There is, however, a remembrance of aërial forms—of spiritual and meaning eyes—of sounds, musical yet sad—a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow, vague, variable, indefinite, unsteady; and like a shadow, too, in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist.

In that chamber was I born. Thus awaking from the long night of what seemed, but was not, nonentity, at once into the very regions of fairy-land—into a palace of imagination—into the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition—it is not singular that I gazed around me with a startled and ardent eye—that I loitered away my boyhood in books, and dissipated my youth in reverie; but it *is* singular that as years rolled away, and the noon of manhood found me still in the mansion of my fathers—it is wonderful what stagnation there fell upon the springs of my life—wonderful how total an inversion took place in the character of my commonest thought. The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn,—not the material of my every-day existence—but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself.

. . . . . .

Berenice and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my paternal halls. Yet differently we grew—I ill of health, and buried in gloom—she agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy; hers the ramble on the hill-side—mine the studies of the cloister—I living within my own heart, and addicted body and soul to the most intense and painful meditation—she roaming carelessly through life with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours. Berenice!—I call upon her name—Berenice!—and from the grey ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are startled at the sound! Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh! gorgeous yet fantastic beauty! Oh! sylph amid the shrubberies of Arnheim! Oh! Naiad among its fountains!—and then—then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease—fell like the simoon upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! the destroyer came and went, and the victim—where was she? I knew her not—or knew her no longer as Berenice.

Among the numerous train of maladies superinduced by that fatal and primary one which effected a revolution of so horrible a kind in the moral and physical being of my cousin, may be mentioned as the most distressing and obstinate in its nature, a species of epilepsy not unfrequently terminating in *trance* itself—trance very nearly resembling positive dissolution, and from which her manner of recovery was, in most instances, startlingly abrupt. In the meantime my own disease—for I have been told that I should call it by no other appellation—my own disease, then, grew rapidly upon me, and assumed finally a monomaniac character of a novel and extraordinary form—hourly and momently gaining vigour—and at length obtaining over me the most incomprehensible ascendancy. This monomania, if I must so term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the *attentive*. It is more than probable that I am not understood; but I fear, indeed, that it is in no manner possible to convey to the mind of the merely general reader, an adequate idea of that nervous *intensity of interest* with which, in my case, the powers of meditation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe.

To muse, for long unwearied hours with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin, or in the typography of a book; to become absorbed for the better part of a summer's day, in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry, or upon the door; to lose myself for an entire night in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; to repeat monotonously some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in;—such were a few of the most common and least pernicious vagaries induced by a condition of the mental faculties, not, indeed, altogether unparalleled, but certainly bidding defiance to anything like analysis or explanation.

Yet let me not be misapprehended.—The undue, earnest, and morbid attention thus excited by objects in their own nature frivolous, must not be confounded in character with that ruminating propensity common to all mankind, and more especially indulged in by persons of ardent imagination. It was not even, as might be at first supposed, an extreme condition, or exaggeration of such propensity, but primarily and essentially distinct and different. In the one instance, the dreamer, or enthusiast, being interested by an object usually *not* frivolous, imperceptibly loses sight of this object in a wilderness of deductions and suggestions issuing therefrom, until, at the conclusion of a day-dream *often replete with luxury,* he finds the *incitamentum* or first cause of his musings entirely vanished and forgotten. In my case the primary object was *invariably frivolous,* although assuming, through the medium of my distempered vision a refracted and unreal importance. Few deductions, if any, were made; and those few pertinaciously returning in upon the original object as a centre. The meditations were *never* pleasurable; and, at the termination of the reverie, the first cause, so far from being out of sight, had attained that supernaturally exaggerated interest which was the prevailing feature of the disease. In a word, the powers of mind more particularly exercised were, with me, as I have said before, the *attentive,* and are, with the day-dreamer, the *speculative.*

My books, at this epoch, if they did not actually serve to irritate the disorder, partook, it will be perceived, largely, in their imaginative and inconsequential nature, of the characteristic qualities

of the disorder itself. I well remember, among others, the treatise of the noble Italian Cœlius Secundus Curio, *De Amplitudine Beati Regni Dei;* St. Austin's great work, *The City of God;* and Tertullian, *De Carne Christi,* in which the paradoxical sentence, *"Mortuus est Dei filius; credibile est quia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit; certum est quia impossibile est,"* occupied my undivided time, for many weeks of laborious and fruitless investigation.

Thus it will appear that, shaken from its balance only by trivial things, my reason bore resemblance to that ocean-crag spoken of by Ptolemy Hephestion, which, steadily resisting the attacks of human violence, and the fiercer fury of the waters and the winds, trembled only to the touch of the flower called Asphodel. And although, to a careless thinker, it might appear a matter beyond doubt, that the alteration produced by her unhappy malady, in the *moral* condition of Berenice, would afford me many objects for the exercise of that intense and abnormal meditation whose nature I have been at some trouble in explaining, yet such was not in any degree the case. In the lucid intervals of my infirmity, her calamity, indeed, gave me pain, and, taking deeply to heart that total wreck of her fair and gentle life, I did not fail to ponder frequently and bitterly upon the wonder-working means by which so strange a revolution had been so suddenly brought to pass. But these reflections partook not of the idiosyncrasy of my disease, and were such as would have occurred, under similar circumstances, to the ordinary mass of mankind. True to its own character, my disorder revelled in the less important but more startling changes wrought in the *physical* frame of Berenice—in the singular and most appalling distortion of her personal identity.

During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind. Through the grey of the early morning—among the trellised shadows of the forest at noonday —and in the silence of my library at night, she had flitted by my eyes, and I had seen her—not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream—not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being—not as a thing to admire, but to analyse—not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation. And *now*— now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach;

yet bitterly lamenting her fallen and desolate condition, I called to mind that she had loved me long, and, in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage.

And at length the period of our nuptials was approaching, when, upon an afternoon in the winter of the year,—one of those unseasonably warm, calm, and misty days which are the nurse of the beautiful Halcyon,[1]—I sat (and sat, as I thought, alone) in the inner apartment of the library. But uplifting my eyes I saw that Berenice stood before me.

Was it my own excited imagination—or the misty influence of the atmosphere—or the uncertain twilight of the chamber—or the grey draperies which fell around her figure—that caused in it so vacillating and indistinct an outline? I could not tell. She spoke no word, and I—not for worlds could I have uttered a syllable. An icy chill ran through my frame; a sense of insufferable anxiety oppressed me; a consuming curiosity pervaded my soul; and sinking back upon the chair, I remained for some time breathless and motionless, with my eyes riveted upon her person. Alas! its emaciation was excessive, and not one vestige of the former being lurked in any single line of the contour. My burning glances at length fell upon the face.

The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died!

. . . . . .

The shutting of a door disturbed me, and, looking up, I found that my cousin had departed from the chamber. But from the disordered chamber of my brain, had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of

[1] For as Jove, during the winter season, gives twice seven days of warmth, men have called this clement and temperate time the nurse of the beautiful Halcyon. SIMONIDES.

the teeth. Not a speck on their surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture in their edges—but what that period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory. I saw them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them *then*. The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. Then came the full fury of *monomania,* and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a phrenzied desire. All other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation. They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light. I turned them in every attitude. I surveyed their characteristics. I dwelt upon their peculiarities. I pondered upon their conformation. I mused upon the alteration in their nature. I shuddered as I assigned to them in imagination a sensitive and sentient power, and even when unassisted by the lips, a capability of moral expression. Of Mad'selle Sallé it has been well said, "*que tous ses pas étaient des sentiments,*" and of Berenice I more seriously believed *que toutes ses dents étaient des idées. Des idées!*—ah here was the idiotic thought that destroyed me! *Des idées!* ah *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason.

And the evening closed in upon me thus—and then the darkness came, and tarried, and went—and the day again dawned—and the mists of a second night were now gathering around—and still I sat motionless in that solitary room; and still I sat buried in meditation, and still the *phantasma* of the teeth maintained its terrible ascendency as, with the most vivid and hideous distinctness, it floated about amid the changing lights and shadows of the chamber. At length there broke in upon my dreams a cry as of horror and dismay; and thereunto, after a pause succeeded the sound of troubled voices, intermingled with many low moanings of sorrow, or of pain. I arose from my seat and, throwing open one of the doors of the library, saw standing out in the ante-chamber a servant maiden, all in tears, who told me that Berenice was—no more. She had been seized with epilepsy in the early morning, and now, at the closing in of the night, the

grave was ready for its tenant, and all the preparations for the burial were completed.

. . . . . .

I found myself sitting in the library, and again sitting there alone. It seemed that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream. I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware that since the setting of the sun Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive—at least no definite comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decipher them, but in vain; while ever and anon, like the spirit of a departed sound, the shrill and piercing shriek of a female voice seemed to be ringing in my ears. I had done a deed—what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me, "*what was it*?"

On the table beside me burned a lamp, and near it lay a little box. It was of no remarkable character, and I had seen it frequently before, for it was the property of the family physician; but how came it *there,* upon my table, and why did I shudder in regarding it? These things were in no manner to be accounted for, and my eyes at length dropped to the open pages of a book, and to a sentence underscored therein. The words were the singular but simple ones of the poet Ebn Zaiat, "*Dicebant mihi sodales si sepulchrum amicæ visitarem, curas meas aliquantulum fore levatas.*" Why then, as I perused them, did the hairs of my head erect themselves on end, and the blood of my body become congealed within my veins?

There came a light tap at the library door, and pale as the tenant of a tomb, a menial entered upon tiptoe. His looks were wild with terror, and he spoke to me in a voice tremulous, husky, and very low. What said he?—some broken sentences I heard. He told of a wild cry disturbing the silence of the night—of the gathering together of the household—of a search in the direction of the sound;—and then his tones grew thrillingly distinct as he whispered me of a violated grave—of a disfigured body enshrouded, yet still breathing, still palpitating, still *alive*!

He pointed to my garments;—they were muddy and clotted with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand;—

it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall;—I looked at it for some minutes;—it was a spade. With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and in my tremor it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

THE ROLL-CALL OF THE REEF

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"Yes, sir," said my host the quarryman, reaching down the relics from their hook in the wall over the chimney-piece; "they've hung there all my time, and most of my father's. The women won't touch 'em; they're afraid of the story. So here they'll dangle, and gather dust and smoke, till another tenant comes and tosses 'em out o' doors for rubbish. Whew! 'tis coarse weather."

He went to the door, opened it, and stood studying the gale that beat upon his cottage-front, straight from the Manacle Reef. The rain drove past him into the kitchen, aslant like threads of gold silk in the shine of the wreckwood fire. Meanwhile by the same firelight I examined the relics on my knee. The metal of each was tarnished out of knowledge. But the trumpet was evidently an old cavalry trumpet, and the threads of its parti-coloured sling, though frayed and dusty, still hung together. Around the side-drum, beneath its cracked brown varnish, I could hardly trace a royal coat-of-arms, and a legend running—*Per Mare per Terram*—the motto of the Marines. Its parchment, though coloured and scented with wood-smoke, was limp and mildewed; and I began to tighten up the straps—under which the drumsticks had been loosely thrust—with the idle purpose of trying if some music might be got out of the old drum yet.

But as I turned it on my knee, I found the drum attached to the trumpet-sling by a curious barrel-shaped padlock, and paused to examine this. The body of the lock was composed of half a dozen brass rings, set accurately edge to edge; and, rubbing the brass with my thumb, I saw that each of the six had a series of letters engraved around it.

I knew the trick of it, I thought. Here was one of those word padlocks, once so common; only to be opened by getting the rings to spell a certain word, which the dealer confides to you.

My host shut and barred the door, and came back to the hearth.

" 'Twas just such a wind—east by south—that brought in what you've got between your hands. Back in the year 'nine it was; my father has told me the tale a score o' times. You're twisting rounds the rings, I see. But you'll never guess the word. Parson Kendall, he made the word, and locked down a couple o' ghosts in their graves with it; and when his time came, he went to his own grave and took the word with him."

"Whose ghosts, Matthew?"

"You want the story, I see, sir. My father could tell it better than I can. He was a young man in the year 'nine, unmarried at the time, and living in this very cottage just as I be. That's how he came to get mixed up with the tale."

He took a chair, lit a short pipe, and unfolded the story in a low musing voice, with his eyes fixed on the dancing violet flames.

"Yes, he'd ha' been about thirty year old in January, of the year 'nine. The storm got up in the night o' the twenty-first o' that month. My father was dressed and out long before daylight; he never was one to 'bide in bed, let be that the gale by this time was pretty near lifting the thatch over his head. Besides which, he'd fenced a small 'taty-patch that winter, down by Lowland Point, and he wanted to see if it stood the night's work. He took the path across Gunner's Meadow—where they buried most of the bodies afterwards. The wind was right in his teeth at the time, and once on the way (he's told me this often) a great strip of oar-weed came flying through the darkness and fetched him a slap on the cheek like a cold hand. But he made shift pretty well till he got to Lowland, and then had to drop upon his hands and knees and crawl, digging his fingers every now and then into the shingle to hold on, for he declared to me that the stones, some of them as big as a man's head, kept rolling and driving past till it seemed the whole foreshore

was moving westward under him. The fence was gone, of course; not a stick left to show where it stood; so that, when first he came to the place, he thought he must have missed his bearings. My father, sir, was a very religious man; and if he reckoned the end of the world was at hand—there in the great wind and night, among the moving stones—you may believe he was certain of it when he heard a gun fired, and, with the same, saw a flame shoot up out of the darkness to windward, making a sudden fierce light in all the place about. All he could find to think or say was, 'The Second Coming—The Second Coming! The Bridegroom cometh, and the wicked He will toss like a ball into a large country!' and being already upon his knees, he just bowed his head and 'bided, saying this over and over.

"But by'm-by, between two squalls, he made bold to lift his head and look, and then by the light—a bluish colour 'twas—he saw all the coast clear away to Manacle Point, and off the Manacles, in the thick of the weather, a sloop-of-war with top-gallants housed, driving stern foremost towards the reef. It was she, of course, that was burning the flare. My father could see the white streak and the ports of her quite plain as she rose to it, a little outside the breakers, and he guessed easy enough that her captain had just managed to wear ship, and was trying to force her nose to the sea with the help of her small bower anchor and the scrap or two of canvas that hadn't yet been blown out of her. But while he looked, she fell off, giving her broadside to it foot by foot, and drifting back on the breakers around Carn dû and the Varses. The rocks lie so thick thereabouts, that 'twas a toss up which she struck first; at any rate, my father couldn't tell at the time, for just then the flare died down and went out.

"Well, sir, he turned then in the dark and started back for Coverack to cry the dismal tidings—though well knowing ship and crew to be past any hope; and as he turned, the wind lifted him and tossed him forward 'like a ball,' as he'd been saying, and homeward along the foreshore. As you know, 'tis ugly work, even by daylight, picking your way among the stones there, and my father was prettily knocked about at first in the dark. But by this 'twas nearer seven than six o'clock, and the day spreading. By the time he reached North Corner, a man could see to read print; hows'ever, he looked neither out to sea nor towards Coverack, but headed straight for the first cottage—the same that stands above North Corner to-day. A man named Billy Ede

lived there then, and when my father burst into the kitchen bawling, 'Wreck! wreck!' he saw Billy Ede's wife, Ann, standing there in her clogs, with a shawl over her head, and her clothes wringing wet.

"'Save the chap!' says Billy Ede's wife, Ann. 'What d' 'ee mean by crying stale fish at that rate?'

"'But 'tis a wreck, I tell 'ee. I've a-zeed'n!'

"'Why, so 'tis,' says she, 'and I've a-zeed 'n too; and so has everyone with an eye in his head.'

"And with that she pointed straight over my father's shoulder, and he turned; and there, close under Dolor Point, at the end of Coverack town, he saw another wreck washing, and the point black with people, like emmets, running to and fro in the morning light. While we stood staring at her, he heard a trumpet sounded on board, the notes coming in little jerks, like a bird rising against the wind; but faintly, of course, because of the distance and the gale blowing—though this had dropped a little.

"'She's a transport,' said Billy Ede's wife, Ann, 'and full of horse soldiers, fine long men. When she struck they must ha' pitched the hosses over first to lighten the ship, for a score of dead hosses had washed in afore I left, half an hour back. An' three or four soldiers, too—fine long corpses in white breeches and jackets of blue and gold. I held the lantern to one. Such a straight young man.'

"My father asked her about the trumpeting.

"'That's the queerest bit of all. She was burnin' a light when me an' my man joined the crowd down there. All her masts had gone; whether they carried away, or were cut away to ease her, I don't rightly know. Anyway, there she lay 'pon the rocks with her decks bare. Her keelson was broke under her and her bottom sagged and stove, and she had just settled down like a sitting hen—just the leastest list to starboard; but a man could stand there easy. They had rigged up ropes across her, from bulwark to bulwark, an' beside these the men were mustered, holding on like grim death whenever the sea made a clean breach over them, an' standing up like heroes as soon as it passed. The captain an' the officers were clinging to the rail of the quarter-deck, all in their golden uniforms, waiting for the end as if 'twas King George they expected. There was no way to help, for she lay right beyond cast of line, though our folk tried it fifty times. And besides them clung a trumpeter, a whacking big man, an' between the heavy seas he would lift his trumpet with

one hand, and blow a call; and every time he blew, the men gave a cheer. There (she says)—hark 'ee now—there he goes agen! But you won't hear no cheering any more, for few are left to cheer, and their voices weak. Bitter cold the wind is, and I reckon it numbs their grip o' the ropes, for they were dropping off fast with every sea when my man sent me home to get his breakfast. Another wreck, you say? Well, there's no hope for the tender dears, if 'tis the Manacles. You'd better run down and help yonder; though 'tis little help that any man can give. Not one came in alive while I was there. The tide's flowing, an' she won't hold together another hour, they say.'

"Well, sure enough, the end was coming fast when my father got down to the point. Six men had been cast up alive, or just breathing—a seaman and five troopers. The seaman was the only one that had breath to speak; and while they were carrying him into the town, the word went round that the ship's name was the *Despatch,* transport, homeward bound from Corunna, with a detachment of the 7th Hussars, that had been fighting out there with Sir John Moore. The seas had rolled her further over by this time, and given her decks a pretty sharp list; but a dozen men still held on, seven by the ropes near the ship's waist, a couple near the break of the poop, and three on the quarter-deck. Of these three my father made out one to be the skipper; close by him clung an officer in full regimentals—his name, they heard after, was Captain Duncanfield; and last came the tall trumpeter; and if you'll believe me, the fellow was making shift there, at the very last, to blow '*God save the King.*' What's more, he got to '*Send us victorious*' before an extra big sea came bursting across and washed them off the deck—every man but one of the pair beneath the poop—and *he* dropped his hold before the next wave; being stunned, I reckon. The others went out of sight at once, but the trumpeter—being, as I said, a powerful man as well as a tough swimmer—rose like a duck, rode out a couple of breakers, and came in on the crest of the third. The folks looked to see him broke like an egg at their feet; but when the smother cleared, there he was, lying face downward on a ledge below them; and one of the men that happened to have a rope round him—I forget the fellow's name, if I ever heard it—jumped down and grabbed him by the ankle as he began to slip back. Before the next big sea, the pair were hauled high enough to be out of harm, and another heave brought them up to grass. Quick work; but master trumpeter wasn't quite dead; nothing

worse than a cracked head and three staved ribs. In twenty minutes or so they had him in bed, with the doctor to tend him.

"Now was the time—nothing being left alive upon the transport—for my father to tell of the sloop he'd seen driving upon the Manacles. And when he got a hearing, though the most were set upon salvage, and believed a wreck in the hand, so to say, to be worth half a dozen they couldn't see, a good few volunteered to start off with him and have a look. They crossed Lowland Point; no ship to be seen on the Manacles, nor anywhere upon the sea. One or two was for calling my father a liar. 'Wait till we come to Dean Point,' said he. Sure enough, on the far side of Dean Point, they found the sloop's mainmast washing about with half a dozen men lashed to it—men in red jackets—every mother's son drowned and staring; and a little farther on, just under the Dean, three or four bodies cast up on the shore, one of them a small drummer-boy, side-drum and all; and, near by, part of a ship's gig, with 'H.M.S. *Primrose*' cut on the stern-board. From this point on, the shore was littered with wreckage and dead bodies—the most of them Marines in uniform; and in Godrevy Cove, in particular, a heap of furniture from the captain's cabin, and amongst it a water-tight box, not much damaged, and full of papers, by which, when it came to be examined next day, the wreck was easily made out to be the *Primrose,* of eighteen guns, outward bound from Portsmouth, with a fleet of transports for the Spanish War—thirty sail, I've heard, but I've never heard what became of them. Being handled by merchant skippers, no doubt they rode out the gale and reached the Tagus safe and sound. Not but what the captain of the *Primrose* (Mein was his name) did quite right to try and club-haul his vessel when he found himself under the land: only he never ought to have got there if he took proper soundings. But it's easy talking.

"The *Primrose,* sir, was a handsome vessel—for her size, one of the handsomest in the King's service—and newly fitted out at Plymouth Dock. So the boys had brave pickings from her in the way of brass-work, ship's instruments, and the like, let alone some barrels of stores not much spoiled. They loaded themselves with as much as they could carry, and started for home, meaning to make a second journey before the preventive men got wind of their doings and came to spoil the fun. But as my father was passing back under the Dean, he happened to take

a look over his shoulder at the bodies there. 'Hullo,' says he, and dropped his gear, 'I do believe there's a leg moving!' And, running fore, he stooped over the small drummer-boy that I told you about. The poor little chap was lying there, with his face a mass of bruises and his eyes closed: but he had shifted one leg an inch or two, and was still breathing. So my father pulled out a knife and cut him free from his drum—that was lashed on to him with a double turn of Manilla rope—and took him up and carried him along here, to this very room that we're sitting in. He lost a good deal by this, for when he went back to fetch his bundle the preventive men had got hold of it, and were thick as thieves along the foreshore; so that 'twas only by paying one or two to look the other way that he picked up anything worth carrying off: which you'll allow to be hard seeing that he was the first man to give news of the wreck.

"Well, the inquiry was held, of course, and my father gave evidence; and for the rest they had to trust to the sloop's papers, for not a soul was saved besides the drummer-boy, and he was raving in a fever, brought on by the cold and the fright. And the seamen and the five troopers gave evidence about the loss of the *Despatch*. The tall trumpeter, too, whose ribs were healing, came forward and kissed the Book; but somehow his head had been hurt in coming ashore, and he talked foolish-like, and 'twas easy seen he would never be a proper man again. The others were taken up to Plymouth, and so went their ways; but the trumpeter stayed on in Coverack; and King George, finding he was fit for nothing, sent him down a trifle of a pension after a while—enough to keep him in board and lodging, with a bit of tobacco over.

"Now the first time that this man—William Tallifer, he called himself—met with the drummer-boy, was about a fortnight after the little chap had bettered enough to be allowed a short walk out of doors, which he took, if you please, in full regimentals. There never was a soldier so proud of his dress. His own suit had shrunk a brave bit with the salt water; but into ordinary frock an' corduroys he declared he would not get—not if he had to go naked the rest of his life; so my father, being a good-natured man and handy with the needle, turned to and repaired damages with a piece or two of scarlet cloth cut from the jacket of one of the drowned Marines. Well, the poor little chap chanced to be standing, in this rig-out, down by the gate of Gunner's Meadow, where they had buried two score and over of his comrades. The

morning was a fine one, early in March month; and along came the cracked trumpeter, likewise taking a stroll.

"'Hullo!' says he; 'good mornin'! And what might you be doin' here?'

"'I was a-wishin',' says the boy, 'I had a pair o' drum-sticks. Our lads were buried yonder without so much as a drum tapped or a musket fired; and that's not Christian burial for British soldiers.'

"'Phut!' says the trumpeter, and spat on the ground; 'a parcel of Marines!'

"The boy eyed him a second or so, and answered up: 'If I'd a tab of turf handy, I'd bung it at your mouth, you greasy cavalry-man, and learn you to speak respectful of your betters. The Marines are the handiest body of men in the service.'

"The trumpeter looked down on him from the height of six foot two, and asked: 'Did they die well?'

"'They died very well. There was a lot of running to and fro at first, and some of the men began to cry, and a few to strip off their clothes. But when the ship fell off for the last time, Captain Mein turned and said something to Major Griffiths, the commanding officer on board, and the Major called out to me to beat to quarters. It might have been for a wedding, he sang it out so cheerful. We'd had word already that 'twas to be parade order, and the men fell in as trim and decent as if they were going to church. One or two even tried to shave at the last moment. The Major wore his medals. One of the seamen, seeing I had hard work to keep the drum steady—the sling being a bit loose for me and the wind what you remember—lashed it tight with a piece of rope; and that saved my life afterwards, a drum being as good as a cork until 'tis stove. I kept beating away until every man was on deck; and then the Major formed them up and told them to die like British soldiers, and the chaplain read a prayer or two—the boys standin' all the while like rocks, each man's courage keeping up the other's. The chaplain was in the middle of a prayer when she struck. In ten minutes she was gone. That was how they died, cavalryman.'

"'And that was very well done, drummer of the Marines. What's your name?'

"'John Christian.'

"'Mine is William George Tallifer, trumpeter, of the 7th Light Dragoons—the Queen's Own. I played *"God Save the King"* while our men were drowning. Captain Duncanfield told me to

sound a call or two, to put them in heart; but that matter of "*God Save the King*" was a notion of my own. I won't say anything to hurt the feelings of a Marine, even if he's not much over five-foot tall; but the Queen's Own Hussars is a tearin' fine regiment. As between horse and foot, 'tis a question o' which gets the chance. All the way from Sahagun to Corunna 'twas we that took and gave the knocks—at Mayorga and Rueda, and Bennyventy.' (The reason, sir, I can speak the names so pat is that my father learnt 'em by heart afterwards from the trumpeter, who was always talking about Mayorga and Rueda and Bennyventy.) 'We made the rear-guard, under General Paget, and drove the French every time; and all the infantry did was to sit about in wine-shops till we whipped 'em out, an' steal an' straggle on' play the tom-fool in general. And when it came to a stand-up fight at Corunna, 'twas the horse, or the best part of it, that had to stay sea-sick aboard the transports, an' watch the infantry in the thick o' the caper. Very well they behaved, too: 'specially the 4th Regiment, an' the 42nd Highlanders an' the Dirty Half-Hundred. Oh, ay; they're decent regiments, all three. But the Queen's Own Hussars is a tearin' fine regiment. So you played on your drum when the ship was goin' down? Drummer John Christian, I'll have to get you a new pair o' drum-sticks for that.'

"Well, sir, it appears that the very next day the trumpeter marched into Helston, and got a carpenter there to turn him a pair of box-wood drum-sticks for the boy. And this was the beginning of one of the most curious friendships you ever heard tell of. Nothing delighted the pair more than to borrow a boat off my father and pull out to the rocks where the *Primrose* and the *Despatch* had struck and sunk; and on still days 'twas pretty to hear them out there off the Manacles, the drummer playing his tattoo—for they always took their music with them—and the trumpeter practising calls, and making his trumpet speak like an angel. But if the weather turned roughish, they'd be walking together and talking; leastwise, the youngster listened while the other discoursed about Sir John's campaign in Spain and Portugal, telling how each little skirmish befell; and of Sir John himself, and General Baird and General Paget and Colonel Vivian, his own commanding officer, and what kind of men they were; and of the last bloody stand-up at Corunna, and so forth, as if neither could have enough.

"But all this had to come to an end in the later summer; for

the boy, John Christian, being now well and strong again, must go up to Plymouth to report himself. 'Twas his own wish (for I believe King George had forgotten all about him), but his friend wouldn't hold him back. As for the trumpeter, my father had made an arrangement to take him on as a lodger as soon as the boy left; and on the morning fixed for the start, he was up at the door here by five o'clock, with his trumpet slung by his side, and all the rest of his kit in a small valise. A Monday morning it was, and after breakfast he had fixed to walk with the boy some way on the road towards Helston, where the coach started. My father left them at breakfast together, and went out to meat the pig, and do a few odd morning jobs of that sort. When he came back, the boy was still at table, and the trumpeter standing here by the chimney-place with the drum and trumpet in his hands, hitched together just as they be at this moment.

"'Look at this,' he says to my father, showing him the lock; 'I picked it up off a starving brass-worker in Lisbon, and it is not one of your common locks that one word of six letters will open at any time. There's *janius* in this lock; for you've only to make the rings spell any six-letter word you please, and snap down the lock upon that, and never a soul can open it—not the maker, even—until somebody comes along that knows the word you snapped it on. Now, Johnny here's goin', and he leaves his drum behind him; for, though he can make pretty music on it, the parchment sags in wet weather, by reason of the sea-water getting at it; an' if he carries it to Plymouth, they'll only condemn it and give him another. And, as for me, I shan't have the heart to put lip to the trumpet any more when Johnny's gone. So we've chosen a word together, and locked 'em together upon that; and, by your leave I'll hang 'em here together on the hook over your fireplace. Maybe Johnny'll come back; maybe not. Maybe, if he comes, I'll be dead an' gone, an' he'll take 'em apart an' try their music for old sake's sake. But if he never comes, nobody can separate 'em; for nobody beside knows the word. And if you marry and have sons, you can tell 'em that here are tied together the souls of Johnny Christian, drummer of the Marines, and William George Tallifer, once trumpeter of the Queen's Own Hussars. Amen.'

"With that he hung the two instruments 'pon the hook there; and the boy stood up and thanked my father and shook hands; and the pair went forth of the door, towards Helston.

"Somewhere on the road they took leave of one another; but

nobody saw the parting, nor heard what was said between them. About three in the afternoon the trumpeter came walking back over the hill; and by the time my father came home from the fishing, the cottage was tidied up and the tea ready, and the whole place shining like a new pin. From that time for five years he lodged here with my father, looking after the house and tilling the garden; and all the while he was steadily failing, the hurt in his head spreading, in a manner, to his limbs. My father watched the feebleness growing on him, but said nothing. And from first to last neither spake a word about the drummer, John Christian; nor did any letter reach them, nor word of his doings.

"The rest of the tale you'm free to believe, sir, or not, as you please. It stands upon my father's words, and he always declared he was ready to kiss the Book upon it before judge and jury. He said, too, that he never had the wit to make up such a yarn; and he defied anyone to explain about the lock, in particular, by any other tale. But you shall judge for yourself.

"My father said that about three o'clock in the morning, April fourteenth of the year 'fourteen, he and William Tallifer were sitting here, just as you and I, sir, are sitting now. My father had put on his clothes a few minutes before, and was mending his spiller by the light of the horn lantern, meaning to set off before daylight to haul the trammel. The trumpeter hadn't been to bed at all. Towards the last he mostly spent his nights (and his days, too) dozing in the elbow-chair where you sit at this minute. He was dozing then (my father said), with his chin dropped forward on his chest, when a knock sounded upon the door, and the door opened, and in walked an upright young man in scarlet regimentals.

"He had grown a brave bit, and his face was the colour of wood-ashes; but it was the drummer, John Christian. Only his uniform was different from the one he used to wear, and the figures '38' shone in brass upon his collar.

"The drummer walked past my father as if he never saw him, and stood by the elbow-chair and said:

" 'Trumpeter, trumpeter, are you one with me?'

"And the trumpeter just lifted the lids of his eyes, and answered, 'How should I not be one with you, drummer Johnny—Johnny boy? The men are patient. 'Till you come, I count; while you march, I mark time; until the discharge comes.'

"'The discharge has come to-night,' said the drummer, 'and the word is Corunna no longer'; and stepping to the chimney-place, he unhooked the drum and trumpet, and began to twist the brass rings of the lock, spelling the word aloud, so—C-O-R-U-N-A. When he had fixed the last letter, the padlock opened in his hand.

"'Did you know, trumpeter, that when I came to Plymouth they put me into a line regiment?'

"'The 38th is a good regiment,' answered the old Hussar, still in his dull voice. 'I went back with them from Sahagun to Corunna. At Corunna they stood in General Fraser's division, on the right. They behaved well.'

"'But I'd fain see the Marines again,' says the drummer, handing him the trumpet; 'and you—you shall call once more for the Queen's Own. Matthew,' he says, suddenly, turning on my father—and when he turned, my father saw for the first time that his scarlet jacket had a round hole by the breast-bone, and that the blood was welling there—'Matthew, we shall want your boat.'

"Then my father rose on his legs like a man in a dream, while they two slung on, the one his drum, and t'other his trumpet. He took the lantern, and went quaking before them down to the shore, and they breathed heavily behind him; and they stepped into his boat, and my father pushed off.

"'Row you first for Dolor Point,' says the drummer. So my father rowed them out past the white houses of Coverack to Dolor Point, and there, at a word, lay on his oars. And the trumpeter, William Tallifer, put his trumpet to his mouth and sounded the *Revelly*. The music of it was like rivers running.

"'They will follow,' said the drummer. 'Matthew, pull you now for the Manacles.'

"So my father pulled for the Manacles, and came to an easy close outside Carn dû. And the drummer took his sticks and beat a tattoo, there by the edge of the reef; and the music of it was like a rolling chariot.

"'That will do,' says he, breaking off; 'they will follow. Pull now for the shore under Gunner's Meadow.'

"Then my father pulled for the shore, and ran his boat in under Gunner's Meadow. And they stepped out, all three, and walked up to the meadow. By the gate the drummer halted and began his tattoo again, looking out towards the darkness over the sea.

"And while the drum beat, and my father held his breath, there came up out of the sea and the darkness a troop of many men, horse and foot, and formed up among the graves; and others rose out of the graves and formed up—drowned Marines with bleached faces, and pale Hussars riding their horses, all lean and shadowy. There was no clatter of hoofs or accoutrements, my father said, but a soft sound all the while, like the beating of a bird's wing, and a black shadow lying like a pool about the feet of all. The drummer stood upon a little knoll just inside the gate, and beside him the tall trumpeter, with hand on hip, watching them gather; and behind them both my father, clinging to the gate. When no more came, the drummer stopped playing, and said, 'Call the roll.'

"Then the trumpeter stepped towards the end man of the rank and called, 'Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons!' and the man in a thin voice answered, 'Here!'

"'Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons, how is it with you?'

"The man answered, 'How should it be with me? When I was young, I betrayed a girl; and when I was grown, I betrayed a friend, and for these things I must pay. But I died as a man ought. God save the King!'

"The trumpeter called to the next man, 'Trooper Henry Buckingham!' and the next man answered, 'Here!'

"'Trooper Henry Buckingham, how is it with you?'

"'How should it be with me? I was a drunkard, and I stole, and in Lugo, in a wine-shop, I knifed a man. But I died as a man should. God save the King!'

"So the trumpeter went down the line; and when he had finished, the drummer took it up, hailing the dead Marines in their order. Each man answered to his name, and each man ended with 'God save the King!' When all were hailed, the drummer stepped back to his mound, and called:

"'It is well. You are content, and we are content to join you. Wait yet a little while.'

"With this he turned and ordered my father to pick up the lantern, and lead the way back. As my father picked it up, he heard the ranks of dead men cheer and call, 'God save the King!' all together, and saw them waver and fade back into the dark, like a breath fading off a pane.

"But when they came back here to the kitchen, and my father set the lantern down, it seemed they'd both forgot about him. For the drummer turned in the lantern-light—and my

father could see the blood still welling out of the hole in his breast—and took the trumpet-sling from around the other's neck, and locked drum and trumpet together again, choosing the letters on the lock very carefully. While he did this he said:

"'The word is no more Corunna, but Bayonne. As you left out an "n" in Corunna, so must I leave out an "n" in Bayonne.' And before snapping the padlock, he spelt out the word slowly—'B-A-Y-O-N-E.' After that, he used no more speech; but turned and hung the two instruments back on the hook; and then took the trumpeter by the arm; and the pair walked out into the darkness, glancing neither to right nor left.

"My father was on the point of following, when he heard a sort of sigh behind him; and there, sitting in the elbow-chair, was the very trumpeter he had just seen walk out by the door! If my father's heart jumped before, you may believe it jumped quicker now. But after a bit, he went up to the man asleep in the chair, and put a hand upon him. It was the trumpeter in flesh and blood that he touched; but though the flesh was warm, the trumpeter was dead.

"Well, sir, they buried him three days after; and at first my father was minded to say nothing about his dream (as he thought it). But the day after the funeral, he met Parson Kendall coming from Helston market: and the parson called out: 'Have 'ee heard the news the coach brought down this mornin'?' 'What news?' says my father. 'Why, that peace is agreed upon.' 'None too soon,' says my father. 'Not soon enough for our poor lads at Bayonne,' the parson answered. 'Bayonne!' cries my father, with a jump. 'Why, yes'; and the parson told him all about a great sally the French had made on the night of April 13th. 'Do you happen to know if the 38th Regiment was engaged?' my father asked. 'Come, now,' said Parson Kendall, 'I didn't know you was so well up in the campaign. But, as it happens, I *do* know that the 38th was engaged, for 'twas they that held a cottage and stopped the French advance.

"Still my father held his tongue; and when, a week later, he walked into Helston and bought a *Mercury* off the Sherborne rider, and got the landlord of the 'Angel' to spell out the list of killed and wounded, sure enough, there among the killed was Drummer John Christian, of the 38th Foot.

"After this, there was nothing for a religious man but to make a clean breast. So my father went up to Parson Kendall and told

the whole story. The parson listened, and put a question or two, and then asked:

"'Have you tried to open the lock since that night?'

"'I han't dared to touch it,' says my father.

"'Then come along and try.' When the parson came to the cottage here, he took the things off the hook and tried the lock. 'Did he say "*Bayonne*"? The word has seven letters.'

"'Not if you spell it with one "n" as *he* did,' says my father.

"The parson spelt it out—B-A-Y-O-N-E. 'Whew!' says he, for the lock had fallen open in his hand.

"He stood considering it a moment, and then he says, 'I tell you what. I shouldn't blab this all round the parish, if I was you. You won't get no credit for truth-telling, and a miracle's wasted on a set of fools. But if you like, I'll shut down the lock again upon a holy word that no one but me shall know, and neither drummer nor trumpeter, dead or alive, shall frighten the secret out of me.'

"'I wish to gracious you would, parson,' said my father.

"The parson chose the holy word there and then, and shut the lock back upon it, and hung the drum and trumpet back in their place. He is gone long since, taking the word with him. And till the lock is broken by force, nobody will ever separate those twain."

Naomi Royde-Smith

MANGAROO

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"I don't know," said the Vicar, "if I've committed a crime, though I rather think it *is* criminal to buy a corpse that's already buried from a man who believes that it's still alive in the kitchen. But I'm quite sure, that as an ecclesiastic, I've done something so irregular that I shall never be able to tell anyone about it. Anyone but you, that is," he added, putting the heel of one shoe on the edge of Miss Dillington's low, broad fire-stool and the heel of the other on the toe of the lower shoe so as to warm the soles of both feet to the greatest advantage.

Miss Dillington laid aside the jumper she was knitting. It was a very beautiful, very complicated jumper and she was using ever so many small balls of bright coloured wool and one larger one of the loveliest creamy fawn. She knew that the Vicar would require an undivided mind to attend to the confession he seemed willing to make.

"Well?" she said, as though murder were a fine art and so quite a usual matter for long, calm fireside talks at the end of an afternoon.

"That's right," said the Vicar. "I'll tell you what I've done and you shall tell me if I ought not to have done it."

"So I will," said Miss Dillington. "But if you think you ought not you wouldn't tell me about it at all. So we'll skip the excuses."

"This isn't one of the usual things. It's the kind of thing that's never happened before and that will not even be useful as a precedent. Did you ever see Mangaroo?"

"Old Mrs. Dishart's macaw? Yes. And hear him. Last time I stayed with you there was a terrible fuss because he'd bitten the milk-man. Have you killed him?"

"Certainly not," said the Vicar. "I've done something much worse than that."

"You couldn't do anything worse because killing him wouldn't have been a bad action." Miss Dillington, though a perfect darling, was sometimes rather a prig.

"Mrs. Dishart died last week," said the Vicar. "She'd been ill for a long time but she wouldn't let Lockhart send in a nurse. Said she could manage quite well with Alice. I don't suppose you ever saw Alice. She was a workhouse child. Mrs. Dishart got her a couple of years ago, and never succeeded in making her presentable. She wasn't exactly a dwarf, and she wasn't exactly an idiot, and she was very strong. She was the only maid who ever stayed more than three months with the old lady, so Martha tells me. The ten years Mrs. Dishart has been in the parish have about exhausted the local supply. The girls were either restive under Mrs. Dishart's strong Sabbatarianism and her Scotch economy, or else they were frightened of Mangaroo. Whatever it was, none of them would stay with her. None till Alice came. I didn't know much about it. Mrs. Dishart was not one of my communicants. She belonged to some small and very uppish sect and used at times to entertain its visiting ministers. She'd come to church on Sunday mornings but not on Saints' Days, or at Christmas or on Good Friday. I called on her

sometimes and she always improved the occasion by denouncing me for Popery. I think she meant choral celebration."

"I daresay all those candles upset her," said Miss Dillington, who loved the Vicar because he was her second cousin, and had been uncle, aunt and best friend to her ever since, a lonely and terrified schoolgirl, she had found him waiting for her at Southampton when she was sent home from Japan after her parents' death in an earthquake twenty years ago.

"They might have done if she'd ever seen them, but I've just told you she wasn't a communicant."

"Perhaps Alice told her?"

"She may have done. But Mrs. Dishart scolded me about my ways long before Alice came on the scene. She let Alice come to church as often as she wanted, I'm bound to confess," said the Vicar, running a finger round his clerical collar and clearing his throat slightly. "I admit, and I'm ashamed of it, that I got a little weary of seeing Alice at almost every service. She breathed through her mouth, and she wore her hat so very far back on her head, and she generally arrived late and stamped up the aisle in a peculiar rocking and very noisy way. She was square in shape, with her legs and arms put on at the corners and she liked a front seat, and she always dropped her prayer-book when she bobbed to the altar. Genuflexion was a physiological uprooting to Alice. I couldn't help wishing she wouldn't attempt it. I used to think that all the beauty, the symbolism, the meaning of the services must be lost on Alice; that she'd be far better suited at the conventicle her mistress attended on week-nights in the summer, at St. Albans. There was a Sunday service there, of course, but that meant Sunday travelling, and Mrs. Dishart naturally neither travelled herself nor would she have permitted any one to travel from her house on Sundays. So Alice kept on coming to church. Being a work house child she'd been baptized and confirmed, just as she'd been vaccinated. She was, now, one of my cure of souls and I had to put up with her. I used to try and talk to her sometimes, but all I got out of her was a snort, a giggle and a dreadful twisting of her shoulders and rolling of her eyes."

"I do hope, Harold," said Miss Dillington, "that you've not been murdering poor Alice."

"Who said anything about murder?" said the Vicar rather crossly. "Let me get on with my tale, child, and stop chattering."

"You've not really begun it yet," said Miss Dillington. "I've

seen Alice come into church myself, and heard about her devotion to Mrs. Dishart and that blue and yellow bird, from Martha. Martha told me that it had been brought home from what she calls the 'troppings' by Mrs. Dishart's son who was killed at Jutland, and that it would come down from its perch and follow Alice all over the house like a cat—or a dog."

"How horrible!" said the Vicar.

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Dillington. "I think it was rather sweet. That poor Alice must have loved the creature. She was probably the only human being who didn't tease it—who wasn't frightened of it. And it must have been the most miraculous creature in her eyes. All that colour and strangeness . . ."

"You don't understand," said the Vicar. "Look here," he went on, taking his feet down from the fire-stool and leaning forward in his chair. "The night after the funeral Alice killed that macaw."

"But——" gasped Miss Dillington.

"Alice killed Mangaroo—with her own hands, killed him in the kitchen. Wrung his neck. He struggled most dreadfully, bit and clawed her hands and face and tore her apron. She'd wrapped him in her apron to do it. But she killed him all right—and buried him too."

"In the garden?" asked Miss Dillington.

"No. That's the whole point. She was all alone in the house. That brute of a nephew took himself and madam, his wife, off after the funeral, having given Alice a month's notice, and told her she was to stop on until he could clear out the furniture, next week. They left her quite alone in the house. Alice said she wasn't frightened—she'd got the macaw. And young Mrs. Dishart, may God forgive her, said she wouldn't have that for long, as she intended to take it to a taxidermist next day and have it killed and get its plumage made up into a hat. It seems that whole-bird toques are being worn in London this winter."

"I've seen some," said Miss Dillington. "Julia Debenham was here yesterday in one—but it was a quieter bird than Mangaroo—a pheasant I think. And I don't suppose it had ever been an indoor pet. What brutes some women are!"

"Quite," said the Vicar. "And Mrs. Gerald Dishart is among them. I'd forgive her for wanting to wear a blue and orange macaw on her head, if she'd had any heart. But to leave that tired, simple child—Alice is not nineteen yet—alone in the house where her mistress had just died was devilish—*devilish*."

"I agree," said Miss Dillington, "but I'm getting a little anxious to know where you come in. Did you go down to comfort Alice and find her killing the macaw so that the she-devil shouldn't have it to hat?"

"No," said the Vicar, "I'm sorry to say that such a thing never occurred to me. I'd buried Mrs. Dishart, and I'd allowed her own parson to read part of the service, and I didn't give Alice a thought. I had to take a service over at Ainley that evening and there was only just time to prepare for it and get there after her funeral. I stayed to supper with Brayton and got back late—after ten o'clock, and went to bed about eleven. I read for half an hour or so, and, towards midnight, I got out of bed to draw the curtains away from the window before putting out my lamp. There was a full moon on Friday, as you being a Londoner won't know, and the sky was clearing under the wind, so that there were alternations of light and shadow across that strip of road between the elms, the bit I can see from my bed room. I like to see it, when there is enough moonlight to show it, empty—resting after all the to and fro of the village. I've never, in all the ten years I've been here, known anyone cross that bit of road after nightfall. The road leads to the church—you know that, and then bends back again and runs in to Sharples End, across the bridge. There's a footway through the marsh that people take as a short cut, anyway. I think most of the villagers would take some persuasion to pass the churchyard wall after dark. The road's a new one as roads go. The last Squire had it made, forty years ago, to save the three miles round to Sharples End, and it runs over the bit of ground in which they buried suicides and unchristened children in the brave old days. Their spirits are said to resent the infringement of their poor half-rights."

"I know," said Miss Dillington. "Martha has told me an awful tale of a ghost with a stake driven through it, and the souls of little babies floating with blue lights over them at All Hallows."

"She daren't tell me that," said the Vicar.

"No," said Miss Dillington, "naturally. Did you see a ghost on the road?"

"I thought I saw what your friends at the Psychical Research call a phantasm of the living," said the Vicar. "The shadow had cleared off from the piece of road between the elms and what I saw was hurrying across the brightness. I should know that rocking stagger, like the mast of a fishing smack in a choppy

sea, wherever I saw it, and she'd got her hat well on the back of her head."

"Alice?" breathed Miss Dillington.

"Even if she'd walked as light and straight as you do, my dear, I should have known her when she stumbled over her own feet (the road was clear enough) and dropped something she was carrying."

"Running away with the macaw, poor thing."

"So I thought, though I did not know about Mangaroo then. I thought, God in His mercy forgive me, I thought she was making off with booty. Taking spoons and things to some confederate."

"My poor Harold!"

"I thought Alice was robbing the dead."

"I'm sure you'd never let her do that."

"Naturally. I put on a few clothes and spent some minutes looking for my overcoat. When I got out on to the road she'd disappeared. I ran on looking for her. There's a dark bit just past the churchyard wall and I thought she might be about there and that was why I couldn't see her. But when I got to the bend of the road towards the bridge—there are no trees for half a mile after you come out of that copse—there was no one in sight. The moon was clear of cloud and the marsh lay like an empty saucer with the river glittering across it like a polished spoon. Not a soul stirring. Owls of course—but nothing human. There are no cross roads or lanes until the further side of the bridge, and she couldn't have got so far in the time. I thought I'd just made a sleepy old fool of myself, seen one of the ghosts, or just imagined or dreamed it. So I turned back, walking slowly, as I was out of breath after my pursuit of the criminal. As I came out of the shade by the church gate I thought the delusion must have become auditory, because from the other side of the wall, I could hear a fearful thwacking noise accompanied by just such sniffs and snuffles as I'd come to associate with Alice's presence anywhere within earshot. I am," the Vicar paused with a wry smile, "I am obliged to admit that for a moment I allowed myself to remember those hints which I had not allowed Martha to amplify but which you seem to have encouraged her to expand into narrative . . ."

"Harold, *dear,* you are not writing a letter to the Bishop, you're just confessing to me."

"Well! I thought it was a banshee or something of the kind.

But I pulled myself together and went into the churchyard. Mrs. Dishart's grave is on the slope, in the new part as they call it, and it lay full in the moonlight. Alice was there all right, beating down the newly turned soil with a weapon of some kind. It turned out to be the basting-spoon—a long, black, iron affair, strong too. She saw me. She couldn't have heard me walking on the grass through the noise she was making. She took me for the Devil. It was an unusual experience."

"Did she run away?"

"No," said the Vicar, "she rose from her knees, sat on the grave-mound, and waved the spoon round her head and shouted 'Go away, Satan' several times."

"She must have been frightened out of her wits."

"That is very kind of you, my dear, but she was nothing of the kind. She had been frightened when she dropped Mangaroo's body on the road, in the place where she knew there were ghosts, but, once inside the churchyard, she knew she was on consecrated ground. You are pitying her for quite the wrong things. Alice is a truculent being with a sense of eternal values and an almost impenetrable earthly darkness of mind. She was burying Mangaroo, not to prevent his being made into a fashionable hat, as you imagine, but in order that he might accompany Mrs. Dishart to heaven. She was giving him Christian burial, you understand, in consecrated ground, and with his mistress. She was quite as ready to defy me about it when I had made my identity clear to her, as she had been to drive Satan away from the grave. It appears that she had consulted Martha in the morning as to the possibility of getting me to allow her to come to the funeral *with* the bird, which she then had thought of burying alive in the grave, and that Martha had assured her I would not countenance such heathen wickedness. When I explained that there was no reason why a dead bird should not lie in Mrs. Dishart's grave, she asked me to read the burial-service—or to pronounce the blessing Mangaroo had missed, so as to ensure his safe passage to glory."

"And did you?" asked Miss Dillington, the tears running down her face.

The Vicar ignored the question.

"Alice had quite intended to appeal to Mrs. Dishart's own minister in the matter, but young Mrs. Dishart's threat had made her realise that she could not risk any delay. So she was outwitting us all. She must have misunderstood her mistress. When she

was dying, Mrs. Dishart had said several times that it would not be heaven if he were not there. I think she meant her son. She did, I know, have misgivings about the boy's salvation. He'd been a little wild. I tried the comfortable doctrine of purgatory one day, I remember, and she routed me with great decision, announcing that her own Mr. Stephenson was inclined to hope that, as Jack had died in battle for his country, he was automatically saved. But neither of them could be sure."

"Oh dear," sobbed Miss Dillington, "I'm so glad I'm an atheist."

"Alice had a much less complicated outlook," said the Vicar. "She knew Mrs. Dishart had gone to heaven, in spite of her Nonconformity, but she was quite sure that the best route there was the one through our own Church. She seemed to feel that Mangaroo might catch Mrs. Dishart up, and that my official benediction would expedite the journey. 'I'd like the mistress to find him there in the morning,' she said."

"Oh, I *do* hope . . ." said Miss Dillington.

"Mrs. Dishart, it seems, has left Alice £50. I daresay that annoyed the nephew and his wife a little. To Alice it was an evidence of saintliness strong enough to counteract any blemishy Dissent in her mistress's soul. 'After that,' she said, 'I was bound to let her have Mangaroo. He was *such* a pet.' I tok her back to the vicarage and made her a shake-down on the study sofa so as not to disturb Martha in the small hours, ond the next day I went over to St. Albans and called on young Dishart. He is cashier at a bank there. I told him exactly what I thought of him and his wife for leaving Alice alone in the house to suit their own greedy convenience, and before he'd time to recover from the shock I offered him ten shillings for the macaw. Said Martha'd taken a fancy for it to decorate the vicarage kitchen."

"But did . . ."

"I didn't tell him the creature was dead and buried, of course. He'd have brought an action against Alice for destroying his property. He took the ten shillings and gave me a receipt for it too, and a month's wages for Alice."

"But did you read a prayer over Mangaroo?"

Miss Dillington got it out at last.

"Haven't I been telling you all this time that that's a thing I cannot tell anybody?" said the Vicar.

"Saki" (H. H. Munro)

SREDNI VASHTAR

From *The Short Stories of Saki* (H. K. Munro), copyright, 1930, by The Viking Press, Inc., N. Y.

Conradin was ten years old, and the doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years. The doctor was silky and effete, and counted for little, but his opinion was endorsed by Mrs. de Ropp, who counted for nearly everything. Mrs. de Ropp was Conradin's cousin and guardian, and in his eyes she represented those three-fifths of the world that are necessary and disagreeable and real; the other two-fifths, in perpetual antagonism to the foregoing, were summed up in himself and his imagination. One of these days Conradin supposed he would succumb to the mastering pressure of wearisome necessary things—such as illnesses and coddling restrictions and drawnout dullness. Without his imagination, which was rampant under the spur of loneliness, he would have succumbed long ago.

Mrs. de Ropp would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin, though she might have been dimly aware that thwarting him "for his good" was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. Conradin hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask. Such few pleasures as he could contrive for himself gained an added relish from the likelihood that they would be displeasing to his guardian, and from the realm of his imagination she was locked out—an unclean thing, which should find no entrance.

In the dull, cheerless garden, overlooked by so many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that, or a reminder that medicines were due, he found little attraction. The few fruit-trees that it contained were set jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste; it would probably have been difficult to find a market-gardener who would have offered ten shillings for their entire yearly produce. In a forgotten corner, however, almost hidden behind a dismal shrubbery, was a disused tool-shed of respectable proportions, and within its walls Conradin found a haven, something that took on the varying aspects of a playroom and a cathedral. He had peopled it with a legion of familiar phantoms, evoked partly from fragments of history and partly

from his own brain, but it also boasted two inmates of flesh and blood. In one corner lived a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen, on which the boy lavished an affection that had scarcely another outlet. Further back in the gloom stood a large hutch, divided into two compartments, one of which was fronted with close iron bars. This was the abode of a large polecat-ferret, which a friendly butcher-boy had once smuggled, cage and all, into its present quarters, in exchange for a long-secreted hoard of small silver. Conradin was dreadfully afraid of the lithe, sharp-fanged beast, but it was his most treasured possession. Its very presence in the tool-shed was a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin. And one day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion. The Woman indulged in religion once a week at a church near by, and took Conradin with her, but to him the church service was an alien rite in the House of Rimmon. Every Thursday, in the dim and musty silence of the tool-shed, he worshipped with mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch where dwelt Sredni Vashtar, the great ferret. Red flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the winter-time were offered at his shrine, for he was a god who laid some special stress on the fierce impatient side of things, as opposed to the Woman's religion, which, as far as Conradin could observe, went to great lengths in the contrary direction. And on great festivals powdered nutmeg was strewn in front of his hutch, an important feature of the offering being that the nutmeg had to be stolen. These festivals were of irregular occurrence, and were chiefly appointed to celebrate some passing event. On one occasion, when Mrs. de Ropp suffered from acute toothache for three days, Conradin kept up the festival during the entire three days, and almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache. If the malady had lasted for another day the supply of nutmeg would have given out.

The Houdan hen was never drawn into the cult of Sredni Vashtar. Conradin had long ago settled that she was an Anabaptist. He did not pretend to have the remotest knowledge as to what an Anabaptist was, but he privately hoped that it was dashing and not very respectable. Mrs. de Ropp was the ground plan on which he based and detested all respectability.

After a while Conradin's absorption in the tool-shed began to attract the notice of his guardian. "It is not good for him to be

pottering down there in all weathers," she promptly decided, and at breakfast one morning she announced that the Houdan hen had been sold and taken away overnight. With her short-sighted eyes she peered at Conradin, waiting for an outbreak of rage and sorrow, which she was ready to rebuke with a flow of excellent precepts and reasoning. But Conradin said nothing: there was nothing to be said. Something perhaps in his white set face gave her a momentary qualm, for at tea that afternoon there was toast on the table, a delicacy which she usually banned on the ground that it was bad for him; also because the making of it "gave trouble," a deadly offence in the middle-class feminine eye.

"I thought you liked toast," she exclaimed, with an injured air, observing that he did not touch it.

"Sometimes," said Conradin.

In the shed that evening there was an innovation in the worship of the hutch-god. Conradin had been wont to chant his praises, to-night he asked a boon.

"Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar."

The thing was not specified. As Sredni Vashtar was a god he must be supposed to know. And choking back a sob as he looked at that other empty corner, Conradin went back to the world he so hated.

And every night, in the welcome darkness of his bedroom, and every evening in the dusk of the tool-shed, Conradin's bitter litany went up: "Do one thing for me, Shredni Vashtar."

Mrs. de Ropp noticed that the visits to the shed did not cease, and one day she made a further journey of inspection.

"What are you keeping in that locked hutch?" she asked. "I believe it's guinea-pigs. I'll have them all cleared away."

Conradin shut his lips tight, but the Woman ransacked his bedroom till she found the carefully-hidden key, and forthwith marched down to the shed to complete her discovery. It was a cold afternoon, and Conradin had been bidden to keep to the house. From the furthest window of the dining-room the door of the shed could just be seen beyond the corner of the shrubbery, and there Conradin stationed himself. He saw the Woman enter, and then he imagined her opening the door of the sacred hutch and peering down with her short-sighted eyes into the thick straw bed where his god lay hidden. Perhaps she would prod at the straw in her clumsy impatience. And Conradin fervently breathed his prayer for the last time. But he knew as he prayed that he did not believe. He knew that the Woman would come out presently

with that pursed smile he loathed so well on her face, and that in an hour or two the gardener would carry away his wonderful god, a god no longer, but a simple brown ferret in a hutch. And he knew that the Woman would triumph always as she triumphed now, and that he would grow ever more sickly under her pestering and domineering and superior wisdom, till one day nothing would matter much more with him, and the doctor would be proved right. And in the sting and misery of his defeat, he began to chant loudly and defiantly the hymn of his threatened idol:

Sredni Vashtar went forth,
His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white. 2
His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.
Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful.

And then of a sudden he stopped his chanting and drew closer to the window-pane. The door of the shed still stood ajar as it had been left, and the minutes were slipping by. They were long minutes, but they slipped by nevertheless. He watched the starlings running and flying in little parties across the lawn; he counted them over and over again, with one eye always on that swinging door. A sour-faced maid came in to lay the table for tea, and still Conradin stood and waited and watched. Hope had crept by inches into his heart, and now a look of triumph began to blaze in his eyes that had only known the wistful patience of defeat. Under his breath, with a furtive exultation, he began once again the pæan of victory and devastation. And presently his eyes were rewarded: out through that doorway came a long, low, yellow-and-brown beast, with eyes a-blink at the waning daylight, and dark wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat. Conradin dropped on his knees. The great polecat-ferret made its way down to a small brook at the foot of the garden, drank for a moment, then crossed a little plank-bridge and was lost to sight in the bushes. Such was the passing of Sredni Vashtar.

"Tea is ready," said the sour-faced maid; "where is the mistress?"

"She went down to the shed some time ago," said Conradin.

And while the maid went to summon her mistress to tea, Conradin fished a toasting-fork out of the sideboard drawer and proceeded to tast himself a piece of bread. And during the toasting of it and the buttering of it with much butter and the slow enjoyment of eating it, Conradin listened to the noises and silences

which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining-room door. The loud foolish screaming of the maid, the answering chorus of wondering ejaculations from the kitchen region, the scuttering footsteps and hurried embassies for outside help, and then, after a lull, the sacred sobbings and the shuffling tread of those who bore a heavy burden into the house.

"Whoever will break it to the poor child? I couldn't for the life of me!" exclaimed a shrill voice. And while they debated the matter among themselves, Conradin made himself another piece of toast.

Henry Spicer

CALLED TO THE RESCUE

Reprinted from *Strange Things Among Us*

The salient features of the following narrative have formed, the writer believes, the basis of a "sensation" story in a popular serial, but nevertheless in the latter differ so materially from the actual facts, that nothing but the *sequence* of circumstances suggests the identity of the two histories. This, then, divested of embellishments, is believed to represent the matter:

A young undergraduate of Cambridge, Mr. D——, had been reading, during the long vacation, at the quiet little town of Exmouth, at which place, as many readers are aware, the river Exe is crossed by a ferry, communicating with the Starcross station on the Great Western Railway. For this purpose a boat remains in constant attendance from dawn till dusk.

One night, between twelve and one o'clock, the young man suddenly awoke, with the impression of having been addressed by an imperative voice, saying, with such distinctness that the last word still rung upon his ear—

"*Go down to the ferry*!"

Thinking it an ordinary dream, he composed himself again to sleep, when a second time the command was repeated, with this addition—

"*The boatman awaits*!"

There was something in this second voice which it seemed to the young man's mind impossible to disregard. He did, however, combat the inclination, and sat up in bed for some minutes, wide-awake, reasoning with himself on what he tried to consider the absurdity of rising in the dead of night, at the bidding of an imaginary voice, to go to a ferry where no boat would be found (for the ferryman resided at Starcross), upon an errand of which he knew nothing. His efforts to dismiss the idea were, however, unsuccessful. He felt, at all events, that sleep was impossible. Then, at the worst, it was but a walk to the ferry and back, and none but himself need be aware of that little excursion. Finally, he sprang from the bed, dressed rapidly, not to leave time for more useless self-argument, and set forth.

He had not reached the ferry when, to his astonishment, the boatman's hoarse voice was heard through the darkness hailing him impatiently—

"Well, you've kept me waiting long enough to-night, I think. I've stopped nigh an hour for you."

The ferryman had, it appeared, received his summons also, but did not attribute it to any unusual source. Finding no passenger waiting on his own side of the river, he probably concluded that he had been hailed by a passing boat, and directed to go over.

By the time Mr. D—— had arrived on the Starcross side, a further idea or impulse, which seemed to have its origin in the former, had gained possession of his mind.

"Exeter!" "Exeter!" "Exeter!" was the word that kept continually reverberating, as it were, in his mental ear, like a summoning bell. His impression *now* was that at Exeter would be fulfilled the purpose, whatever it might prove to be, of this strange nocturnal expedition. To Exeter he accordingly proceeded by the first opportunity, and, it being only eight or ten miles, reached that good city about dawn.

Now, for the first time, he felt at a loss. All impulse or impression had departed. Wandering aimlessly about the streets, he blamed himself severely for the readiness with which he had yielded to what he now regarded as an idle fancy, and only comforted himself with the idea that at that early hour none of his acquaintance were likely to be abroad to question him as to his untimely visit. Mr. D—— resolved to return home by the next train; but, meanwhile, the shops and houses began to open, and passing an hotel the young gentleman thought he could scarcely do better than while away the hour that must necessarily intervene by ordering some breakfast.

The waiter was very slow in bringing the repast, but when at length he did so, apologised for the delay on the plea that the assizes, then proceeding, had filled the house to overflowing.

Mr. D—— had heard nothing of the assizes, and took but little interest in the subject. Seeing, however, that the waiter regarded it as an event of considerable importance, he good-humouredly encouraged him to continue the theme, and was rewarded with a very amusing history of such cases as had been already disposed of, as well as with the waiter's own views concerning those yet remaining to be tried. Upon the whole, the man's entertaining volubility ended by inspiring young D—— with a portion of his own interest in the matter, and, accordingly, instead of returning to Exmouth by the next train, he strolled

about until the court opened, and then took his place among the spectators.

The case just commencing seemed to create unusual excitement. The prisoner at the bar, who was in the dress of a carpenter, was arraigned on a capital charge. The chain of evidence against him, though circumstantial, was complete, and a conviction seemed inevitable. There was, in fact, no opening for a defence, unless the prisoner were in a position to prove the witnesses, one and all, mistaken in his identity, and establish an *alibi*.

When asked what he had to say, he quietly replied:

"It is impossible that I could have committed this crime, because, on the day and at the hour it took place, I was sent for to mend the sashline of a window at Mr. G——'s house, at M——. There is *one* gentleman," he added, after a pause, "who could prove that I was there, but I don't know who he is, nor where to have him looked for. Yes, I *know* he could prove my innocence, for a particular reason, that would remind him of me; but, there, I can't help it, the Lord's will be done," and the poor fellow, with a sigh, appeared to resign himself to his fate.

All this time Mr. D—— had been listening with profound attention to the progress of the trial, and when the prisoner concluded his sad and hopeless address, he started, and looked earnestly at him. As his eyes still dwelt upon the gloomy, toil-worn face—one by one, link by link—a chain of circumstances, trivial enough at the time, but now important as bearing upon the liberty, if not the very life, of a fellow-creature, came back to his remembrance.

He had gone, some months before, to pay an early visit to a friend at M——. The latter was from home, but, wishing particularly to see him, D—— had decided to await his return, and, for that purpose, had gone up to his friend's library, meaning to beguile the interval with a book. Here, however, he found a carpenter, making some repairs about the window, and, in place of reading, he stood for some minutes watching the man, and conversing with him about his work. While doing so, something was said that he was desirous of noting down, and he took out his memorandum-book for the purpose, but found that he had lost his pencil, when the carpenter, observing his difficulty, handed him his own (a short, brown, stumpy article, with square sides), saying that "if he might make so bold, Mr. D—— was welcome to it."

All this came back to the young man's mind, as clearly as if it had occurred but the day before. Hastily turning to his pocket-book, he there found the very entry he had made, date included, written in the thick but faint lines produced by the carpenter's pencil. He instantly made known to the court his wish to be examined on the man's behalf, and, being sworn, deposed to the above facts, clearly identifying the prisoner, as well as the pencil, which the man produced from his pocket. The jury were satisfied, and returned a verdict of acquittal.

It is difficult to meet a sufficiently authenticated case of this description, otherwise than with the simple confession that God's ways are not as our ways, and that it may be His pleasure, as unquestionably it is within His power, to suffer his ministering angels to speak in this mysterious tongue to the souls of those whom He has selected as the earthly instruments of His divine will.

Hugh Walpole

THE ENEMY

From *The Silver Thorn,* by Hugh Walpole. Copyright 1923 by New Metropolitan Fiction, Inc., and 1928 by Doubleday, Doran & Co.

At a quarter-past eight in the morning, every working day of the year, summer and winter, little Jack Harding left his little house in Ealing for the Charing Cross Road, where he had a little bookshop. A month every year he took a holiday, but even during that month he might be said to go through the same procedure, because, wherever he might be, he woke up at half-past seven and, lying on his back in bed, went through all the stages of dressing, having breakfast, hurrying to the station, changing at Hammersmith, getting out at Leicester Square, walking up to the little shop, scolding the boy with adenoids, opening his correspondence, and entering happily on the business of the day. It was luxurious indeed to lie on one's back and take this journey, hearing the waves murmur outside one's window, or seeing the clouds pass in lazy procession, or hearing the separator hard at work in some distant part of the farmhouse. He

enjoyed his holiday, of course, but he enjoyed still more getting back to work again. He loved his shop, although it made him the barest living in these difficult post-war days, and he could not be said to care very generally for books for their own sake. He was a little man, stout and round like a rolling-pin, with very small feet and hands of which he was immensely proud. He was cheery and optimistic by temperament, loved to hear the sound of his own voice, and, although he was forty-five, was still unmarried. He enjoyed the society of ladies, but liked them in general rather than in particular. An old woman looked after him and his little house, cheated him and robbed him, scolded him and abused him, except when he was ill, when she adored him and took an enormous amount of trouble to make him comfortable. He had only one enemy in the world.

Now the point about this enemy was that he had seldom spoken to him. Some years ago, when he had first come to live in Ealing, he had noticed on his regular morning journey a large, heavy red-faced man, who lived apparently in his own street, always plunged out of his door at precisely the moment when he, Harding, passed it, and so plunged apparently in order to have a bright morning conversation. In fact, it very soon became Harding's conviction that the large, heavy gentleman waited behind the dining-room curtain until he saw him approach and then made his plunge. Now Harding did not want a bright morning conversation. His mind was busy with the details of the day's work. The catalogue that he was preparing, the cheap lot of books that had come in yesterday and would, most of them, find their way into the sixpenny box outside, and the chances of discovering some unexpected find that would add glory to the aforementioned catalogue: such questions as these made a morning conversation with a stranger extremely irritating, and Harding was English enough to suspect at once of the most abominable crimes anybody who spoke to him without a proper Ealing introduction.

This large man was, in Harding's view, exactly the person of whom you would expect a crime. On the first morning, the large man had insisted on walking with Harding to the station, he talked in a great booming voice about the weather, about the neighbouring music-hall and a dainty little piece who was dancing there, about some shares he had somewhere, about his being a widower, about some geraniums in his back garden, about some horses, about indigestion, and about where he was going

for his summer holiday. All these things before they reached the station at all. Then in the train he sat next to Harding, might indeed be said almost to sit over him, and went on with a long, cheerful proclamation about potatoes and beans and cabbages, shouting it all out at the top of his voice in rivalry with the noisy train. If there was one thing in the world that Harding detested it was talking against a train, he himself having a rather small, shrill voice which was not at its best when it was unduly raised, as he very well knew. Then this horrible man stuck closely to him at Hammersmith, marched down the platform with him, pushed past the ticket-collector, marched up the other platform, and sat over him once again in the Tube. He went all the way with him to Leicester Square and would, Harding believed, have followed him to his bookshop had he not managed to lose him in the crowd. Work was spoilt for Harding that day. Whenever he tried to think clearly that man's booming voice seemed to get in the way, his large, bushy, black moustache seemed to whisk up and down the bookshelves, and his broad, aggressive chest overshadowed the customers.

Harding had not been encouraging, but nevertheless, next day there was the man again, darting down the steps with a "Well, good morning, good morning, how are we to-day?" so that Harding, who detested to be called "we," was so deeply annoyed that he murmured that he had forgotten something, hurried back to his house again, and was twenty minutes late at the bookshop.

This was how it began, and every day now the poor little man was overshadowed by this horrible stranger. This horrible man's name was Tonks, and he had something to do with vegetables. He had no children and was thinking of marrying again, but couldn't quite make up his mind. He gave his reluctant companion most unpleasant and intimate details of his earlier married life. He had an especially disagreeable habit of putting his hand on little Harding's shoulder. The really strange thing was that Tonks seemed to have no particular liking for any other of the numerous company who went down to the City at that same hour day by day. There were, as Harding complained, any number of men who would have been delighted with Tonks's confidences, but Tonks appeared to wish to have none of them, and Harding, being a modest little man, could only explain this as a quite definite persecution, deliberately indulged in by Tonks for his own especial annoyance.

Now the passion of Harding's life was his bookshop. He thought about it all day, slept with it all night, ate it at every meal, and was never so happy as when he was imagining wonderful plans for its future. These plans were not really of a literary kind. His vision and dream was an enormous shop containing thousands and thousands and thousands of volumes. Room succeeded room, rows and rows of bookshelves towered up into the mysterious mists of the ceiling. There were so many books that nobody knew how many there were, nor ever would know, and with this sense of size and multitude went also a keen pleasure in what may vulgarly be called "spotting the winner." Harding never went to horse-races; as he once explained to a friend, he did his horse-racing in the book-shop.

This was just at the time when there was a passion, both in America and England, for modern first editions, and Harding had a special catalogue of modern firsts of which he was immensely proud. This catalogue might have been better, and he would certainly have made more money had he gone in for quality, rather than quantity, but he loved his catalogues to be large and full of important names. He had a list of modern writers, and used to mark them up and down in this list week by week according to the value of the moment. At one time it would be, we will say, Drinkwater and De la Mare who were going to win the literary stakes, and his modern catalogue that quarter would be full of Drinkwaters and De la Mares, a great many of them of no value at all, but he would put little mystical notes under the items, like "Very scarce" or "Rare in this state," and then hope for the best. Nothing pleased him so much as when somebody came into his shop, asked for some tawdry novel, and was then lured by him into a consideration of rare firsts. He loved to see them open their eyes in wide amazement as he explained to them the wonderful speculation that investing in these mysterious Drinkwaters would be, of them going up week by week, that somebody in his shop had bought two years ago a little slim Masefield for almost nothing at all, and that now ten pounds wouldn't buy it. Ladies might be seen going from his shop with a little bundle of mysterious poets, when they had intended to purchase only a very unmysterious story to read in the train. Had this been all, he might truly be said to be encouraging a love of real literature among the masses but unfortunately those same ladies very often returned at a later date with the same mysterious poets under their arm, expecting

him very naïvely to give them an increased price for these same writers and being greatly indignant when they found that these books had gone down rather than up.

Nothing is perhaps more curious in ordinary daily life than the way in which somebody who has perhaps a very remote connection with ourselves and our affairs creeps in upon our consciousness and dominates it. I remember once staying with a man in a fine country house, surrounded by a magnificent park, shut off most securely from all the world, and worried almost to death by the personality of a certain butcher in a neighbouring village. He didn't even get his meat from the man; he was simply conscious of him, of his red face, his stout body, his blood-stained knife, and this man interfered so seriously with his happiness that he sold his house and went elsewhere. That is an extreme case, I dare say, but we must all of us be able to remember times when we have been affected in something of this fashion.

Mr. Tonks crept in upon the consciousness of Mr. Harding very slowly. Mr. Harding could not really be said to be a very imaginative man. He had only an imagination about the possible size of his bookshop. With regard to his own daily affairs he was very practical and sensible. Nevertheless he found himself after a week or two hesitating before he took his walk to the station. Would Tonks be there springing down the steps towards him? Would his cheery laugh ring through South Ealing? Would Harding this time be ahead of him? He noticed soon that he did not move off to the station with his accustomed alacrity, that he paused a little in his bit of garden, and that once or twice he peered down the street to see whether there were anyone there. He began to have a physical feeling about Tonks, as though he were an egg ever so slightly bad, or a bird just a tiny bit too high. He contemplated the possibility of reaching the station by some other route. He thought that perhaps it would be almost as quick to go from Ealing Broadway, but, as a matter of honest fact, he knew that it would not. Then he concocted for himself an elaborate conversation with Tonks: how he said to him, very politely, "Good morning," how they started off to the station together, and how on the way he explained very gravely but with the utmost politeness that it was quite essential for him to have absolute silence on his journey down to Charing Cross Road because there were so many business problems that only that morning hour before the morning rush could solve. He

saw himself then bowing to Mr. Tonks, saying that he hoped that he understood, that no kind of offence was intended, and that if there was one person in the world with whom he would like to talk at that moment it was Mr. Tonks, but that, in fact, there must be nobody at all. Harding thought this all out very carefully, and it seemed to him that there was nothing whatever to prevent him from carrying out his desire. There was, in fact, nothing to prevent him except that the words would not come. Something tied him when he saw Mr. Tonks, just as though a seal had been placed on his lips, and this made him more irritated than ever. "I should have thought," he complained angrily to himself, "that the fellow could see that I don't want him. I surely make it plain enough." However, the fellow did not see, and Mr. Tonks became more and more amiable, more and more voluble, was ever more and persistently there.

The next stage in the proceedings was that Harding dreamt about Tonks. He was not a man who dreamt very often; only occasionally, when he had had a late supper, he fell screaming from an enoromus height, and he did occasionally, dream about somebody coming into his shop with a first "Pilgrim's Progress" in perfect condition, and offering it to him for sixpence, but he was on the whole most definitely not a dreamer. One night he saw Tonks standing in his room in his night-shirt. The vision was so vivid, the smile on Tonks's face so real, the night-shirt so exactly what in real life it would be, that it was hard to believe it was a dream. "What have you come here for?" he asked, angrily. "I'm never going to leave you again," the figure replied. Poor Harding woke with a scream. Then the dream came quite frequently. There were different aspects of it. The worst was when Tonks's naked feet could be heard padding up the stairs. Then there was a pause outside the bedroom door, and Tonks's laboured breathing came like a whistle through the wood-work. Then the door slowly opened, and first Tonks's head was seen peering round, and then the whole big body came into view. Then the door was softly closed, and Tonks stood there watching. Always Harding said the same thing—"What have you come here for?" and Tonks said, "I'm never going to leave you again."

Then suddenly came a week when Tonks did not appear—no sign of him at all. Harding absolutely sighed with relief. Perhaps Tonks had gone away. Perhaps he was on a holiday and would be drowned in the sea or ridden over by a motor-car.

Perhaps he had committed some crime and left the country. At any rate, for a week he disappeared, and Harding was astounded and secretly irritated to find that towards the end of the week he missed him quite seriously, just because to have somebody so thoroughly to dislike seemed to give piquancy to the work of the day, but, lo and behold! there on Monday morning was Tonks again, hurrying down the steps with his, "Well, well, how are we, then, to-day?" and then going on to explain that he had had a horribly bad cold, that his throat had hurt him something terribly, and his inside not been at all the thing. On that day Harding could have killed him, and he did manage to say as they drew near to the station, "Look here, I've got to think something out. Let me be quiet, won't you?" to which Tonks, who had been sneezing hysterically all down the road, replied through his cold-invaded nose: "All-right, old feller; forgive my sneezing, won't you? Terrible things to get rid of, colds."

The next stage of this affair was that Tonks's personality invaded the shop. It can only have been hysteria on the part of Harding, and he was most certainly very far from being an hysterical person, but one morning, opening the door of the shop, stepping in, sniffing as he invariably did the aroma of old decaying books, the beautiful scent of piled-up dusty volumes, it seemed to him that Tonks had followed in after him. He whisked sharply around, but of course there was no one there, but for half a moment he could have sworn that out of the tail of his eye he saw the heavy shoulder, the rough red of the cheek, the beginning of that hateful smile.

"That man's getting on my nerves," he said to himself. "I really must refuse to think of him any longer." But he could not help himself. There was something about Tonks as though he had been Frankenstein's monster of Harding's own creation. Harding, like all Englishmen, was, underneath his British exterior, a desperately sentimental man. A little of a sycophant too, something of a crawler, and the odd thing was that if he had met Tonks just a little differently—that is, on a convivial evening at the house of a mutual friend—he might have liked him very much indeed, so close are love and hatred to one another. As it was, he hated him, and every day with increasing fervour. He was perhaps working too hard, bothering himself too strenuously about his new catalogue. Perhaps he was taking too little exercise and eating things that did not agree with him.

Whatever the explanation, certain it is that Tonks's shadow was always now appearing at the shop, hiding behind the counter, squeezing itself in between the covers of boks, balancing itself precariously on ladders, always turning up in the most unexpected places. And then one day came the climax. Tonks did make a real appearance in the true flesh. He came in one morning about midday, sauntering in, one hand in his pocket, smiling all over his face. Harding was alone in the shop at the time.

"Well, well, how are we?" he called out. "I've caught you in your lair at last. You never would tell me where you worked, and I've had to find it out for myself."

So he'd been spying on him? Harding's face crimsoned. He had to bend over a book that he was examining to hide his agitation. Yes, he'd been spying on him, the beast!

Tonks waited a moment for a reply, and getting none went on most genially, "Well, well, I'm sure you're busy to-day. I've come in to buy a book from you."

"What sort of a book?" said Harding almost in a whisper.

"Well, it's for a young lady friend of mine, and she's taking a long journey up to the North of Scotland, and wants something to read. 'Why,' I said to her, 'I know the very man. He's a great friend of mine and very clever, and I'll ask him to advise me.' "

Harding suddenly looked up and leaned across the counter, his face pushed forward. The two men were very close to one another.

"I'm not your friend," he said, "and I'll have you know it. I hate the very sight of you. I've been wanting to tell you this for a long time."

The smile suddenly left Tonks's face as though it had been snatched away by somebody standing behind him. His eyes were wide with surprise.

"Well, I never!" he said. "Do you really feel like that about me? I wonder why?"

"Never mind why," said Harding, furiously. "The fact's true, and that's enough. *You*'ve been irritating me for months, walking along to the station with me, only *I* haven't had the courage to tell you so. I should have thought a man would have seen it."

He bent down, his face still crimson, staring into his book. The puzzled expression deepened on Tonks's countenance. His whole body seemed to grow puzzled, too. His waistcoat developed new creases, his hands seemed to wrinkle. Then his great chest heaved a mighty sigh.

"It's strange," he said. "I wonder if you know anything against me? Not that there is much against me that I can think of, but it's curious because I took a liking to you. A great liking to you. Most unusually quick it was. At the very first sight of you, as one might say. I suppose I'm slow to notice things, but there's never been a man I'd have liked for a friend so much as I'd have liked you. There's something about you sort of appeals to me. I suppose you couldn't explain a little?"

"No, I couldn't," said Harding, ferociously. "I just don't like you, and that's all there is about it. We're better apart, if you'll excuse me for saying so."

"Oh, I'll excuse you," said Tonks, shaking his head slowly, pulling himself together; "but it's a great pity—a terrible pity. I'm a lonely sort of man. Being a widower's a bit difficult, because, you see, if you've liked the first woman it's most improbable you're going to be pleased with the second, and if you haven't liked the first woman, why, you're off matrimony altogether, so to speak. If you understand what I mean. I'm sort of lonely in that house. I've been wanting to ask you in for weeks past. I've got an organ in the dining-room you'd love to hear. It's as good as a church. You've never seen my dog, have you?"

"No, I haven't," said Harding, "and don't want to."

"Well, well," said Tonks, slowly, "that's the end of that. I'm glad I've got the dog, though," he said, as he went out of the shop.

There began after this an even worse period for Harding, because although Tonks never actually met him now on the way to the station, never spoke to him indeed, he was always just round the corner. Harding could never pass his house without feeling sure he was hiding behind the dining-room curtain and longing to rush out and speak to him. At Hammersmith their paths were sometimes crossed, and then Tonks had a mixture of pride and pleading on his large round face that was terrible to see. Harding had now a curious sense that in one way or another he was in the wrong. Absurd, of course, but there you are. He only hated the man the more for it. The man became a proverb in his mind. When he was talking with his friends he would quote him as an instance of the depth of his feeling. "There's a man I know," he would say, "whom you wouldn't believe the way I hate, and I really couldn't tell you why. Just his face or his smile or something. Case of Dr. Fell, I suppose. Really gives me the creeps. You might say there's nothing against

him, and yet in a way there is. His being alive's against him, if you understand what I mean." And then all the friends would laugh together and say that they understood perfectly.

There was one morning a most difficult moment when Tonks came down the steps with his dog, the most hideous mongrel you ever saw, kind of a fox-terrier with a black spot on its nose, and one ear half bitten off in a dog fight. The awkward thing was that the dog leapt upon Harding as though he were an old, old friend.

"Come 'ere, Spot, come 'ere!" Tonks called out, looking extremely embarrassed, but Spot persisted in claiming Harding for an old friend. He simply wouldn't leave him alone. The two men stopped and looked at one another, and Harding had the most curious feeling, as though he would like to go up and embrace Tonks and put his hat straight. A most curious and un-British feeling, as everybody will allow, and Tonks and the dog went one way and Harding went another. Bah! now he hated that man! Why couldn't he go and live somewhere else? Nevertheless, all the way to the shop he felt ashamed of himself and couldn't settle down to anything for the rest of the day.

Three days later, about six in the evening, he was returning home. He left the shop a little earlier than usual because it was so fine and pleasant. He wanted to get into his little garden and do some digging. He got out at South Ealing Station and walked briskly down the road homewards.

Outside Tonks's house there was an agitation. Several people were hanging about and a policeman was looking into space.

"Excuse me, constable, is there anything the matter?" asked Harding.

"Gentleman been run over by a motor omnibus," said the policeman. "Just round the corner here. No use taking 'im to the 'ospital. 'E's done for."

"Done for!" gasped Harding.

"Dead as mutton," said the policeman. Harding turned white. It was as though he himself had killed him.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the policeman. "Are you a friend of the gentleman?"

"Why?" asked Harding.

"Why, because 'e don't seem to have anybody in the house who does belong. Nobody but an old woman who comes in and does for 'im and a dawg. The dawg won't leave his bed. Must 'ave been a lonely sort of life for a man."

"Yes, I am a friend of his," said Harding, suddenly, "a very great friend."

He pushed past the policeman and went into the house. There was a doctor there, an old woman crying, the dog sitting on his hindquarters at the foot of the bed and not moving. There was Tonks himself in a nice clean night-shirt with his hair brushed, looking very calm and quiet, a suggestion of a smile hovering about his mouth.

"Caught him in the stomach," said the doctor. "Instantaneous. Are you a friend of the deceased?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," said Harding, "a great friend."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be anybody else," said the doctor. "Must have been a lonely sort of life."

The old woman sobbed. "Oh, 'e was a kind gentleman," she said.

"I was his best friend," said Harding. "We used to go into town together every morning. I'll see to everything."

He did. For weeks he worked at Tonks's affairs, which were in a curiously complicated state. There seemed to be no relations. In the end, when everything was sold and all debts paid, there were a few hundred pounds, and these Harding gave to the old woman. No one seemed to question for a moment that Harding was Tonks's best friend. The action of the dog only confirmed it. He refused to go near anyone save Harding. Harding had to take him home to live with him.

"No, he's not much of a dog," he would say, "but, you see his master was my best friend, so there you are."

And the funny part of it all was that that was true.

H. G. Wells

THE INEXPERIENCED GHOST

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The scene amidst which Clayton told his last story comes back very vividly to my mind. There he sat, for the greater part of the time, in the corner of the authentic settle by the spacious open fire, and Sanderson sat beside him smoking the Broseley clay

that bore his name. There was Evans, and that marvel among actors, Wish, who is also a modest man. We had all come down to the Mermaid Club that Saturday morning, except Clayton, who had slept there overnight—which indeed gave him the opening of his story. We had golf until golfing was invisible; we had dined, and we were in that mood of tranquil kindliness when men will suffer a story. When Clayton began to tell one, we naturally supposed he was lying. It may be that indeed he was lying—of that the reader will speedily be able to judge as well as I. He began, it is true, with an air of matter-of-fact anecdote, but that we thought was only the incurable artifice of the man.

"I say!" he remarked, after a long consideration of the upward rain of sparks from the log that Sanderson had thumped, "you know I was alone here last night?"

"Except for the domestics," said Wish.

"Who sleep in the other wing," said Clayton. "Yes. Well——" He pulled at his cigar for some little time as though he still hesitated about his confidence. Then he said, quite quietly, "I caught a ghost!"

"Caught a ghost, did you?" said Sanderson. "Where is it?"

And Evans, who admires Clayton immensely and has been four weeks in America, shouted, "*Caught* a ghost, did you, Clayton? I'm glad of it! Tell us all about it right now."

Clayton said he would in a minute, and asked him to shut the door.

He looked apologetically at me. "There's no eavesdropping of course, but we don't want to upset our very excellent service with any rumours of ghosts in the place. There's too much shadow and oak panelling to trifle with that. And this, you know, wasn't a regular ghost. I don't think it will come again—ever."

"You mean to say you didn't keep it?" said Sanderson.

"I hadn't the heart to," said Clayton.

And Sanderson said he was surprised.

We laughed, and Clayton looked aggrieved. "I know," he said, with the flicker of a smile, "but the fact is it really *was* a ghost, and I'm as sure of it as I am that I am talking to you now. I'm not joking. I mean what I say."

Sanderson drew deeply at his pipe, with one reddish eye on Clayton, and then emitted a thin jet of smoke more eloquent than many words.

Clayton ignored the comment. "It is the strangest thing that has ever happened in my life. You know I never believed in

ghosts or anything of the sort, before, ever; and then, you know, I bag one in a corner: and the whole business is in my hands."

He meditated still more profoundly and produced and began to pierce a second cigar with a curious little stabber he affected.

"You talked to it?" asked Wish.

"For the space, probably, of an hour."

"Chatty?" I said, joining the party of the sceptics.

"The poor devil was in trouble," said Clayton, bowed over his cigar-end and with the very faintest note of reproof.

"Sobbing?" someone asked.

Clayton heaved a realistic sig at the memory. "Good Lord!" he said; "yes." And then, "Poor fellow! yes."

"Where did you strike it?" asked Evans, in his best American accent.

"I never realised," said Clayton, ignoring him, "the poor sort of thing a ghost might be," and he hung us up again for a time, while he sought for matches in his pocket and lit and warmed to his cigar.

"I took an advantage," he reflected at last.

We were none of us in a hurry. "A character," he said, "remains just the same character for all that it's been disembodied. That's a thing we too often forget. People with a certain strength or fixity of purpose may have ghosts of a certain strength and fixity of purpose—most haunting ghosts, you know, must be as one-idea'd as monomaniacs and as obstinate as mules to come back again and again. This poor creature wasn't." He suddenly looked up rather queerly, and his eye went round the room. "I say it," he said, "in all kindliness, but that is the plain truth of the case. Even at the first glance he struck me as weak."

He punctuated with the help of his cigar.

"I came upon him, you know, in the long passage, His back was towards me and I saw him first. Right off I knew him for a ghost. He was transparent and whitish; clean through his chest I could see the glimmer of the little window at the end. And not only his physique but his attitude struck me as being weak. He looked, you know, as though he didn't know in the slightest whatever he meant to do. One hand was on the panelling and the other fluttered to his mouth. Like—*so*!"

"What sort of physique?" said Sanderson.

"Lean. You know that sort of young man's neck that has two great flutings down the back, here and here—so! And a little

meanish head with scrubby hair and rather bad ears. Shoulders bad, narrower than the hips; turndown collar, ready-made short jacket, trousers baggy and a little frayed at the heels. That's how he took me. I came very quietly up the staircase. I did not carry a light, you know—the candles are on the landing table and there is that lamp—and I was in my list slippers, and I saw him as I came up. I stopped dead at that—taking him in. I wasn't a bit afraid. I think that in most of these affairs one is never nearly so afraid or excited as one imagines one would be. I was surprised and interested. I thought, 'Good Lord! Here's a ghost at last! And I haven't believed for a moment in ghosts during the last five-and-twenty years.'"

"Um," said Wish.

"I suppose I wasn't on the landing a moment before he found out I was there. He turned on me sharply, and I saw the face of an immature young man, a weak nose, a scrubby little moustache, a feeble chin. So for an instant we stood—he looking over his shoulder at me—and regarded one another. Then he seemed to remember his high calling. He turned round, drew himself up, projected his face, raised his arms, spread his hands in approved ghost fashion—came towards me. As he did so his little jaw dropped, and he emitted a faint, drawn-out 'Boo.' No, it wasn't—not a bit dreadful. I'd dined. I'd had a bottle of champagne, and being all alone, perhaps two or three—perhaps even four or five—whiskies, so I was as solid as rocks and no more frightened than if I'd been assailed by a frog. 'Boo!' I said. 'Nonsense. You don't belong to *this* place. What are you doing here?'

"I could see him wince. 'Boo—oo,' he said.

"'Boo—be hanged! Are you a member?' I said; and just to show I didn't care a pin for him I stepped through a corner of him and made to light my candle. 'Are you a member?' I repeated, looking at him sideways.

"He moved a little so as to stand clear of me, and his bearing became crestfallen. 'No,' he said, in answer to the persistent interrogation of my eye; 'I'm not a member—I'm a ghost.'

"'Well, that doesn't give you the run of the Mermaid Club. Is there anyone you want to see, or anything of that sort?' And doing it as steadily as possible for fear that he should mistake the carelessness of whisky for the distraction of fear, I got my candle alight. I turned on him, holding it. 'What are you doing here?' I said.

"He had dropped his hands and stopped his booing, and there he stood, abashed and awkward, the ghost of a weak, silly, aimless young man. 'I'm haunting,' he said.

"'You haven't any business to,' I said in a quiet voice.

"'I'm a ghost,' he said, as if in defence.

"'That may be, but you haven't any business to haunt here. This is a respectable private club; people often stop here with nursemaids and children, and, going about in the careless way you do, some poor little mite could easily come upon you and be scared out of her wits. I suppose you didn't think of that?"

"'No, sir,' he said, 'I didn't.'

"'You should have done. You haven't any claim on the place, have you? Weren't murdered here, or anything of that sort?'

"'None, sir; but I thought as it was old and oak-panelled——'

"'That's *no* excuse.' I regarded him firmly. 'Your coming here is a mistake,' I said, in a tone of friendly superiority. I feigned to see if I had my matches, and then looked up at him frankly. 'If I were you I wouldn't wait for cock-crow—I'd vanish right away.'

"He looked embarrassed. 'The fact *is,* sir——' he began.

"'I'd vanish,' I said, driving it home.

"'The fact is, sir, that—somehow—I can't.

"'You *can't*?'

"'No, sir. There's something I've forgotten. I've been hanging about here since midnight last night, hiding in the cupboards of the empty bedrooms and things like that. I'm flurried. I've never come haunting before, and it seems to put me out.'

"'Put you out?'

"'Yes, sir. I've tried to do it several times, and it doesn't come off. There's some little thing has slipped me, and I can't get back.'

"That, you know, rather bowled me over. He looked at me in such an abject way that for the life of me I couldn't keep up quite the high hectoring vein I had adopted. 'That's queer,' I said, and as I spoke I fancied I heard someone moving about down below. 'Come into my room and tell me more about it,' I said. 'I didn't, of course, understand this,' and I tried to take him by the arm. But, of course, you might as well have tried to take hold of a puff of smoke! I had forgotten my number, I think; anyhow, I remember going into several bedrooms—it was lucky I was the only soul in that wing—until I saw my traps. 'Here we are,' I said, and sat down in the armchair; 'sit down and tell me all

about it. It seems to me you have got yourself into a jolly awkward position, old chap.'

"Well, he said he wouldn't sit down; he'd prefer to flit up and down the room if it was all the same to me. And so he did, and in a little while we were deep in a long and serious talk. And presently, you know, something of those whiskies and sodas evaporated out of me, and I began to realise just a little what a thundering rum and weird business it was that I was in. There he was, semi-transparent—the proper conventional phantom and noiseless except for his ghost of a voice—flitting to and fro in that nice, clean, chintz-hung old bedroom. You could see the gleam of the copper candlesticks through him, and the lights on the brass fender, and the corners of the framed engravings on the wall, and there he was telling me all about this wretched little life of his that had recently ended on earth. He hadn't a particularly honest face, you know, but being transparent, of course, he couldn't avoid telling the truth."

"Eh?" said Wish, suddenly sitting up in his chair.

"What?" said Clayton.

"Being transparent—couldn't avoid telling the truth—I don't see it," said Wish.

"*I* don't see it," said Clayton, with inimitable assurance. "But it *is* so, I can assure you nevertheless. I don't believe he got once a nail's breadth off the Bible truth. He told me how he had been killed—he went down into a London basement with a candle to look for a leakage of gas—and described himself as a senior English master in a London private school when that release occurred."

"Poor wretch!" said I.

"That's what I thought, and the more he talked the more I thought it. There he was, purposeless in life and purposeless out of it. He talked of his father and mother and his schoolmaster, and all who had ever been anything to him in the world, meanly. He had been too sensitive, too nervous; none of them had ever valued him properly or understood him, he said. He had never had a real friend in the world, I think; he had never had a success. He had shirked games and failed examinations. 'It's like that with some people,' he said; 'whenever I got into the examination-room or anywhere everything seemed to go.' Engaged to be married of course—to another over-sensitive person, I suppose—when the indiscretion with the gas escape ended his affairs. 'And where are you now?' I asked. 'Not in——?'

"He wasn't clear on that point at all. The impression he gave me was of a sort of vague, intermediate state, a special reserve for souls too non-existent for anything so positive as either sin or virtue. *I* don't know. He was much too egotistical and unobservant to give me any clear idea of the kind of place, kind of country, there is on the Other Side of Things. Wherever he was, he seems to have fallen in with a set of kindred spirits: ghosts of weak Cockney young men, who were on a footing of Christian names, and among these there was certainly a lot of talk about 'going haunting' and things like that. Yes—going haunting! They seemed to think 'haunting' a tremendous adventure, and most of them funked it all the time. And so primed, you know, he had come."

"But really!" said Wish to the fire.

"These are the impressions he gave me, anyhow," said Clayton modestly. "I may, of course, have been in a rather uncritical state, but that was the sort of background he gave to himself. He kept flitting up and down, with his thin voice going—talking, talking about his wretched self, and never a word of clear, firm statement from first to last. He was thinner and sillier and more pointless than if he had been real and alive. Only then, you know, he would not have been in my bedroom here—if he *had* been alive. I should have kicked him out."

"Of course," said Evans, "there *are* poor mortals like that."

"And there's just as much chance of their having ghosts as the rest of us," I admitted.

"What gave a sort of point to him, you know, was the fact that he did seem within limits to have found himself out. The mess he had made of haunting had depressed him terribly. He had been told it would be a 'lark': he had come expecting it to be a 'lark,' and here it was, nothing but another failure added to his record! He proclaimed himself an utter out-and-out failure. He said, and I can quite believe it, that he had never tried to do anything all his life that he hadn't made a perfect mess of—and through all the wastes of eternity he never would. If he had had sympathy, perhaps—— He paused at that, and stood regarding me. He remarked that, strange as it might seem to me, nobody, not anyone, ever, had given him the amount of sympathy I was doing now. I could see what he wanted straight away, and I determined to head him off at once. I may be a brute, you know, but being the Only Real Friend, the recipient of the confidences of one of these egotistical weaklings, ghost or body, is beyond my

physical endurance. I got up briskly. 'Don't you brood on these things too much,' I said. 'The thing you've got to do is to get out of this—get out of this sharp. You pull yourself together and *try*.' 'I can't,' he said. 'You try,' I said, and try he did."

"Try!" said Sanderson. *"How?"*

"Passes," said Clayton.

"Passes?"

"Complicated series of gestures and passes with the hands. That's how he had come in and that's how he had to get out again. Lord! what a business I had!"

"But how could *any* series of passes——" I began.

"My dear man," said Clayton, turning on me and putting a great emphasis on certain words, "you want *everything* clear. I don't know *how*. All I know is that you *do*—that *he* did, anyhow, at least. After a fearful time, you know, he got his passes right and suddenly disappeared."

"Did you," said Sanderson slowly, "observe the passes?"

"Yes," said Clayton, and seemed to think. "It was tremendously queer," he said. "There we were, I and this thin vague ghost, in that silent room, in this silent, empty inn, in this silent little Friday-night town. Not a sound except our voices and a faint panting he made when he swung. There was the bedroom candle, and one candle on the dressing-table alight, that was all—sometimes one or other would flare up into a tall, lean, astonished flame for a space. And queer things happened. 'I can't,' he said; 'I shall never——!' And suddenly he sat down on a little chair at the foot of the bed and began to sob and sob. Lord! what a harrowing whimpering thing he seemed!

"'You pull yourself together,' I said, and tried to pat him on the back, and . . . my confounded hand went through him! By that time, you know, I wasn't nearly so—massive as I had been on the landing. I got the queerness of it full. I remember snatching back my hand out of him, as it were, with a little thrill, and walking over to the dressing-table. 'You pull yourself together,' I said to him, 'and try.' And in order to encourage and help him I began to try as well."

"What!" said Sanderson, "the passes?"

"Yes, the passes."

"But——" I said, moved by an idea that eluded me for a space.

"This is interesting," said Sanderson, with his finger in his pipe-bowl. "You mean to say this ghost of yours gave way——"

"Did his level best to give away the whole confounded barrier? *Yes.*"

"He didn't." said Wish; "he couldn't. Or you'd have gone there too."

"That's precisely it," I said, finding my elusive idea put into words for me.

"That *is* precisely it," said Clayton, with thoughtful eyes upon the fire.

For just a little while there was silence.

"And at last he did it?" said Sanderson.

"At last he did it. I had to keep him up to it hard, but he did it at last—rather suddenly. He despaired, we had a scene, and then he got up abruptly and asked me to go through the whole performance, slowly, so that he might see. 'I believe,' he said, 'if I could *see* I should spot what was wrong at once.' And he did. '*I* know,' he said. 'What do you know?' said I. '*I* know,' he repeated. Then he said, peevishly, 'I *can't* do it, if you look at me—I really *can't;* it's been that, partly, all along. I'm such a nervous fellow that you put me out.' Well, we had a bit of an argument. Naturally I wanted to see; but he was as obstinate as a mule, and suddenly I had come over as tired as a dog—he tired me out. 'All right,' I said, '*I* won't look at you,' and turned towards the mirror, on the wardrobe, by the bed.

"He started off very fast. I tried to follow him by looking in the looking-glass, to see just what it was had hung. Round went his arms and his hands, so, and so, and so, and then with a rush came to the last gesture of all—you stand erect and open out your arms—and so, don't you know, he stood. And then he didn't! He didn't! He wasn't! I wheeled round from the looking-glass to him. There was nothing! I was alone, with the flaring candles and a staggering mind. What had happened? Had anything happened? Had I been dreaming? . . . And then, with an absurd note of finality about it, the clock upon the landing discovered the moment was ripe for striking *one.* So!—Ping! And I was as grave and sober as a judge, with all my champagne and whisky gone into the vast serene. Feeling queer, you know—confoundedly *queer!* Queer! Good Lord!"

He regarded his cigar-ash for a moment. "That's all that happened," he said.

"And then you went to bed?" asked Evans.

"What else was there to do?"

I looked Wish in the eye. We wanted to scoff, and there was something, something perhaps in Clayton's voice and manner, that hampered our desire.

"And about these passes?" said Sanderson.

"I believe I could do them now."

"Oh!" said Sanderson, and produced a pen-knife and set himself to grub the dottel out of the bowl of his clay.

"Why don't you do them now?" said Sanderson, shutting his pen-knife with a click.

"That's what I'm going to do," said Clayton.

"They won't work," said Evans.

"If they do——" I suggested.

"You know, I'd rather you didn't," said Wish, stretching out his legs.

"Why?" asked Evans.

"I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

"But he hasn't got 'em right," said Sanderson, plugging too much tobacco into this pipe.

"All the same, I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

We argued with Wish. He said that for Clayton to go through those gestures was like mocking a serious matter. "But you don't believe——?" I said. Wish glanced at Clayton, who was staring into the fire, weighing something in his mind. "I do—more than half, anyhow, I do," said Wish.

"Clayton," said I, "you're too good a liar for us. Most of it was all right. But that disappearance . . . happened to be convincing. Tell us, it's a tale of cock and bull."

He stood up without heeding me, took the middle of the hearth-rug, and faced me. For a moment he regarded his feet thoughtfully, and then for all the rest of the time his eyes were on the opposite wall, with an intent expression. He raised his two hands slowly to the level of his eyes and so began. . . .

Now, Sanderson is a Freemason, a member of the lodge of the Four Kings, which devotes itself so ably to the study and elucidation of all the mysteries of Masonry past and present, and among the students of this lodge Sanderson is by no means the least. He followed Clayton's motions with a singular interest in his reddish eye. "That's not bad," he said, when it was done. "You really do, you know, put things together, Clayton, in a most amazing fashion. But there's one little detail out."

"I know," said Clayton. "I believe I could tell you which."

"Well?"

"This," said Clayton, and did a queer little twist and writhing and thrust of the hands.

"Yes."

"That, you know, was what *he* couldn't get right," said Clayton. "But how do *you*——?"

"Most of this business, and particularly how you invented it, I don't understand at all," said Sanderson, "but just that phase —I do." He reflected. "These happen to be a series of gestures— connected with a certain branch of esoteric Masonry— Probably you know. Or else—— *How?*" He reflected still further. "I do not see I can do any harm in telling you just the proper twist. After all, if you know, you know; if you don't, you don't."

"I know nothing," said Clayton, "except what the poor devil let out last night."

"Well, anyhow," said Sanderson, and placed his churchwarden very carefully upon the shelf over the fireplace. Then very rapidly he gesticulated with his hands.

"So?" said Clayton, repeating.

"So," said Sanderson, and took his pipe in hand again.

"Ah, *now*," said Clayton, "I can do the whole thing—right."

He stood up before the waning fire and smiled at us all. But I think there was just a little hesitation in his smile. "If I begin——" he said.

"I wouldn't begin," said Wish.

"It's all right!" said Evans. "Matter is indestructible. You don't think any jiggery-pokery of this sort is going to snatch Clayton into the world of shades. Not it! You may try, Clayton, so far as I'm concerned, until your arms drop off at the wrists."

"I don't believe that," said Wish, and stood up and put his arm on Clayton's shoulder. "You've made me half believe in that story somehow, and I don't want to see the thing done."

"Goodness!" said I, "here's Wish frightened!"

"I am," said Wish, with real or admirably feigned intensity. "I believe that if he goes through these motions right he'll *go*."

"He'll not do anything of the sort," I cried. "There's only one way out of this world for men, and Clayton is thirty years from that. Besides. . . . And such a ghost! Do you think——?"

Wish interrupted me by moving. He walked out from among our chairs and stopped beside the table and stood there. "Clayton," he said, "you're a fool."

Clayton, with a humorous light in his eyes, smiled back at him. "Wish," he said, "is right and all you others are wrong. I shall go. I shall get to the end of these passes, and as the last swish whistles through the air, Presto!—this hearthrug will be vacant, the room will be blank amazement, and a respectably dressed gentleman of fifteen stone will plump into the world of shades. I'm certain. So will you be. I decline to argue further. Let the thing be tried."

"No," said Wish, and made a step and ceased, and Clayton raised his hands once more to repeat the spirit's passing.

By that time, you know, we were all in a state of tension—largely because of the behaviour of Wish. We sat all of us with our eyes on Clayton—I, at least, with a sort of tight, stiff feeling about me as though from the back of my skull to the middle of my thighs my body had been changed to steel. And there, with a gravity that was imperturbably serene, Clayton bowed and swayed and waved his hands and arms before us. As he drew towards the end one piled up, one tingled in one's teeth. The last gesture, I have said, was to swing the arms out wide open, with the face held up. And when at last he swung out to this closing gesture I ceased even to breathe. It was ridiculous, of course, but you know that ghost-story feeling. It was after dinner, in a queer, old shadowy house. Would he, after all——?

There he stood for one stupendous moment, with his arms open and his upturned face, assured and bright, in the glare of the hanging lamp. We hung through that moment as if it were an age, and then came from all of us something that was half a sigh of infinite relief and half a reassuring *"No!"* For visibly—he wasn't going. It was all nonsense. He had told an idle story, and carried it almost to conviction, that was all! . . . And then in that moment the face of Clayton changed.

It changed. It changed as a lit house changes when its lights are suddenly extinguished. His eyes were suddenly eyes that were fixed, his smile was frozen on his lips, and he stood there still. He stood there, very gently swaying.

That moment, too, was an age. And then, you know, chairs were scraping, things were falling, and we were all moving. His knees seemed to give, and he fell forward, and Evans rose and caught him in his arms. . . .

It stunned us all. For a minute I suppose no one said a coherent thing. We believed it, yet could not believe it. . . . I came out of

a muddled stupefaction to find myself kneeling beside him, and his vest and shirt were torn open, and Sanderson's hand lay on his heart. . . .

Well—the simple fact before us could very well wait our convenience; there was no hurry for us to comprehend. It lay there for an hour; it lies athwart my memory, black and amazing still, to this day. Clayton had, indeed, passed into the world that lies so near to and so far from our own, and he had gone thither by the only road that mortal man may take. But whether he did indeed pass there by that poor ghost's incantation, or whether he was stricken suddenly by apoplexy in the midst of an idle tale —as the coroner's jury would have us believe—is no matter for my judging; it is just one of those inexplicable riddles that must remain unsolved until the final solution of all things shall come. All I certainly know is that, in the very moment, in the very instant, of concluding those passes, he changed, and staggered, and fell down before us—dead!

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